



A ROLLING STONE

GEORGE SAND, CARROLL OWEN

A Rolling Stone

George Sand, Carroll Owen

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A ROLLING STONE.

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A ROLLING STONE.

BY

GEORGE SAND, *London.*

Baroness de Ségur (Ségur) Paris

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

CARROLL OWEN.



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A ROLLING STONE.

I.

I WAS on a tour of inspection of finance in the little town of Arvers, in Auvergne, and I had been staying for two days at the hotel of the Grand Monarque. What grand monarch? and why this classic sign, still so widely spread in provincial towns? Is it a tradition of the reign of Louis XIV.? I am absolutely ignorant, and I ask any one who knows. The image which characterized this illustrious and mysterious personage has disappeared almost everywhere. In my childhood I remember having seen one which represented him dressed like a Turk.

The hostess of the Grand Monarque, Madame Ouchafol, was a comely and very respectable woman, devoted to all that pertained to any sort of established authority, ancient or modern nobility, plebeian opulence, official position, or local influence, — all this without prejudice to that consideration due to the minor functionaries and commercial travellers who constitute the standing source of profit, the regular *rotation* of an inn. Additionally, Madame Ouchafol had religious sentiments, and opposed the sceptics of her neighborhood.

One evening, when I was smoking my cigar on the hotel balcony, I saw,

upon the place which divides the church from the mayoralty and the inn, a tall young man whose face and bearing would attract attention anywhere. He was arm in arm with a very ugly peasant-girl. Two young fellows, slightly inebriated, who looked like artisans in holiday garb, followed him, walking like him with girls in peasant-caps, but pretty enough. Why had this handsome youth, whose simple dress did not lack taste, and who did not appear intoxicated, selected for partner or companion the ugliest and least smartly dressed?

This little problem would not have arrested my attention beyond a minute, if Madame Ouchafol, who was dusting the leaves of a blighted orange-tree placed upon the balcony, had not taken care to make me notice it.

"You are looking at handsome Lawrence, are you not?" she said to me, casting on the merry-making Antinous the most ironical and scornful glance.

And, replying to my answer without waiting for it:—

"He is a pretty fellow, I do not deny it; but see! always in bad company! He may be the son of a peasant, but he has a rich and titled uncle, and besides, when one has re-

ceived an education, and dresses like a gentleman, he does not hobnob with everybody at the village weddings; above all, he does not pass through the town in broad daylight, with frights like that upon his arm! But that boy is mad; he cares for nothing; and there is one surprising thing, monsieur, he never devotes himself to a pretty girl who might do him credit. He always drags about some monster, and not the most straight-laced, I beg you to believe!"

"I will believe whatever you wish, Madame Ouchafol; but how do you explain this singular taste?"

"I do not take it upon myself to explain it. One can make nothing of the conduct of this poor boy; for still, monsieur, I am interested in him. His godmother has been my friend from childhood, and often we lament together to see him turn out so badly."

"He is then a downright good-for-nothing?"

"Ah! monsieur, if that were all! If he was only a little fast and reckless! If one could say, 'He amuses himself, he is wild, he is a scapegrace, who will reform like so many others!' But no, monsieur. He drinks a little; but he does not run in debt; he has not bad habits exactly; neither is he quarrelsome, except on some occasion, when he sees at the village *fêtes* or at the mechanics' balls a man maltreated, he fights off those who bully him, and beats them well, according to accounts. In short, he might be something, for he is neither stupid nor idle; but here is the trouble;—monsieur has ideas,

and one idea in particular, which is the despair of his relations!"

"You make me curious to know this famous idea."

"I will tell you so much, that, instead of accepting a situation in the custom-house, or in the telegraph-office, or a tobacconist's shop, or something at the record office, the registry or the mayoralty,—for they have offered him all these,—he preferred to live in the faubourg with his father, who is an old farmer, and who has bought a piece of ground which he has converted into a nursery. This poor Father Lawrence is a worthy man, very industrious, who has only this one child, and who would have liked to raise him above his condition, hoping that his elder brother, who is very wealthy, would take a fancy to him, and make him his heir. Not at all; the young man, who, after his bachelor's degree, had gone to Normandy, where the rich uncle resides, allowed himself to be led away into frightful misconduct, monsieur, and disappeared for two or three years, without giving any report of himself."

"What misconduct, Madame Ouchafol?"

"Ah! monsieur, permit me not to tell you, from esteem for Father Lawrence, who raises fruit along his walls, and has always supplied me with fine peaches and raisins, not to mention vegetables, which he raises also at the foot of his enclosure, for which he buys the manure from my stable, and pays for it better than many people of higher station; through friendship likewise for the young man's godmother, who has been my

friend, as I have told you, ever since we made our first communion together, I ought to conceal the misfortune and the shame, that this handsome Lawrence, as they call him here, has brought upon his friends, and which would spread throughout the town, if by some mischance the thing should get about."

It became evident that Madame Ouchafol was dying with the wish to impart to me the mystery of handsome Lawrence's "misconduct." More mischievous than curious just then, I punished her for her reticence by taking my hat, and going out to breathe the air beside a pretty streamlet, which glides along the slope where the town is charmingly situated.

Many small towns are, like this, charming in appearance when viewed as a whole from without, hideous and dirty within. A projecting crag, a ray of sunlight resting on an old spire, a fine wooded line in the background, a streamlet at the foot, suffice to make up a picture which sets them off to perfection, and of which they form the principal accident, whose arrangement leaves nothing to desire.

I gave myself up entirely to the calm pleasure of contemplation, and I saw the last reflections of the sunset die out in an admirably clear sky. This presage of fine weather for the morrow recalled a plan which I had formed of visiting a cascade that one of my predecessors in the office which I filled had recommended to me. It was too late to undertake any walk whatever; but, as I was passing near a rustic tavern whence issued noise

and light, I resolved to make inquiries there.

I fell into the midst of a village wedding. They were drinking and dancing. The first person who became aware of my presence was precisely handsome Lawrence.

"Ah! Father Tournache," cried he, with a fine, clear, strong voice, which rose above all the others, "a traveler! serve him. Because there is a merry-making at your house, you must not neglect those who have a right to stay there. Come, monsieur," added he, giving me his chair; "there is no longer a seat anywhere. Take mine, I am going to dance a *bourrée* in the barn, and on my way out I will tell them to wait on you."

"I wish to disturb no one," rejoined I, touched by his politeness, but not much attracted by the appearance and odor of the feast. "I came to ask a direction."

"Can they give it to you?"

"You probably better than any one else. I would like to know on which side and at what distance are the rock and cascade of the Volpie?"

"Very well, come with me. I will give you an idea."

As, this time, despite his courtesy and obliging spirit, the fine fellow seemed to me a little tipsy, I followed him, rather from politeness, than in the hope of receiving a very lucid explanation.

"Stay," said he, after having conducted me, somewhat unsteadily, about ten steps from the little house; "you see that long, uniform hill, which cuts off the horizon? It is higher than it looks; it is really a

mountain, that takes an hour's walk to climb it. Now, do you see a sort of slanting gap at the highest point, just above the point of the village spire? It is there."

"I confess that I see nothing. Night is approaching, and to-morrow I should have, perhaps, some difficulty in finding my way."

"I was about to propose my company to you for the day after, since I think of going there; but to-morrow, it is too soon."

"I regret it."

"So do I; but what can we do? I absolutely must get drunk to-night, and it is probable that I shall sleep all day to-morrow."

"It is an urgent necessity that you get drunk?"

"Yes, I could not do otherwise than drink a little to celebrate the wedding of a playmate of my childhood. In quarter of an hour, if I left off there, I should be sad; with me the first stage is always clear and reasonable. I like better to finish off, grow gay, tender, mad, and idiotic; after that, one sleeps, and there's an end of it."

"There is no harm in becoming gay, tender, mad, and even idiotic, as you anticipate; but sometimes, beneath the influence of wine, one becomes wicked. You are not afraid of that, then?"

"No; I am convinced that wine, when it is not drugged, develops and reveals in us only the qualities and defects that exist there. I am not wicked, I do not drink absinthe. I am sure of myself."

"That is fortunate. But you spoke of dancing?"

"Yes, dancing intoxicates too. The great bagpipe which brays out in your ears, the motion, the heat, the dust, all that is charming. Come!"

While thus speaking he had an accent of sadness, almost of despair, in which I fancied I perceived the revelation of some secret grief or of some bitter remorse. The words of my hostess recurred to me, and I was seized with a feeling of pity for this man, who was so handsome, who expressed himself so well, and who appeared so amiable and frank.

"Why not, instead of 'finishing off' so quickly," said I, "remain here a little longer, and smoke a good cigar with me?"

"No, I should grow melancholy, and should bore you."

"That is my concern, I believe?"

"Mine also. Stay, I see plainly that you are a well-bred man, and that it would be pleasant to converse with you. Do not visit the Volpie until day after to-morrow."

"Do me the favor to come there to-morrow, and not to get intoxicated to-night."

"Ah! you seem to be interested in me? Do you know me?"

"I see you to-day for the first time."

"Truly? I know that you are the inspector of finance, who has been staying for the last two days at Mother Ouchafol's. You go about the province for four months every year. You have met me nowhere?"

"Nowhere. You are then known away from here?"

"I travelled over almost every part of France, for three years. Tell

me why you advise me not to drink."

"Because I have no fondness either for soiled things or deteriorated men. Mere matter of order and propriety, that is all."

He reflected a moment, then asked me my age.

"About the same as yours, — thirty years."

"No, I am twenty-six. I have the appearance of being thirty then?"

"I see you indistinctly in the twilight."

He replied sadly: —

"No, on the contrary, I believe that you see truly. I have lost four years of my life, since my face has four years too many. I will not commit an excess to-night, and, if you will go to the Volpie to-morrow, I will knock on your door at four o'clock in the morning. The collector has spoken to me of you. He says that you are a charming man."

"Thanks. I count upon you."

"Would you like to see the true *bourrée* of Auvergne danced before you go?"

"I will even dance it with you, if they will permit me."

"They will be delighted, but I must present you as my friend."

"Very well! It is not impossible that I become so."

"I accept the omen."

He pleased me; I could not help it; and, whatever might be the "frightful misconduct" with which the hostess of the Grand Monarque had reproached him, the curiosity which he aroused in me was almost sympathy.

In the barn, where he introduced

me, and where the noise, the dust, and the heat, predicted by him, left nothing to desire, I was received with much cordiality, and invited to drink freely.

"No, no," cried Lawrence, "he does not drink, but he dances. Stay, friend, be my *vis-à-vis*."

He had invited the bride; I invited the tall, ugly girl that I had seen upon his arm, an hour before. I thought to excite no jealousy, but soon perceived that she was greatly sought after, perhaps on account of her bold and sprightly air, perhaps for the sake of her wit. I had wished to make her talk of Lawrence; the hubbub, which was, so to speak, suffocating, did not allow me to engage in continued conversation.

Lawrence was dancing opposite me, and certainly he threw something of coquetry into it. He had taken off his coat and waistcoat, like the others. His shirt, still irreproachably white, outlined his fine figure, his broad shoulders, and his full chest; perspiration made his thick jet-black hair curl more closely; his eyes, heavy but a moment before, flashed fire. He had the grace inseparable from beautiful outlines and finely attached muscles; and although he danced the classic *bourrée* like a true peasant, he converted this dull and monotonous thing into a characteristic dance, full of animation and plastic art. Some intoxication certainly lingered in his legs; but in a few moments this unsteadiness disappeared, and it seemed to me that he was anxious to display himself before me in all his physical advantages, to dispel the bad opinion

with which he might have inspired me at first sight.

While conjecturing for what purpose he had travelled throughout nearly all of France, it occurred to me that he might have been a model. When he returned to the tavern, whither I accompanied him, and where they called upon him to sing, I was persuaded that he had been a strolling singer. But his voice was fresh, and he rendered the country songs with a charming simplicity which bespoke the artist, and not the cross-roads performer.

Gradually my ideas about him grew confused. I was warm, and I had accepted without distrust several bumpers of a pale-colored wine, which looked very innocent, but which was in reality remarkably heady. I felt that, if I did not wish to set a bad example to the very one whom I had just been lecturing, and if I did not wish to be accused by Madame Ouchafol of some "frightful misconduct," I must escape from the convivialities of these worthy peasants. So I slipped off adroitly, and on my way to the town had the mortification of perceiving that my gait was a trifle unsteady, that I saw the telegraph-posts double, and that I felt a most unusual desire to laugh and sing.

In proportion as I fancied I approached the town the trouble increased. My feet grew heavy, and, when I had walked a little longer than seemed necessary, I ascertained that the town had left the hill, or I had left the road to the town. Charming predicament for a public functionary, and especially for one

of the soberest of men, who had never in his life been overcome by wine!

I thought—for my brain remained perfectly clear—that this intoxication had come on too quickly not to pass away as soon. I resolved to wait until it had vanished; and catching sight of an open hovel which seemed untenanted, I entered it and threw myself upon a heap of straw, without particularly noticing the neighborhood of an ass, who was sleeping in an upright position, his nose in the empty rack.

I followed his example; I slept a sleep as peaceful as his own. When I awoke it was daybreak; the ass was still asleep, although his legs moved restlessly, and he clucked his chain from time to time. I had some trouble in recalling how I came in such a place and in such company. At length memory returned. I arose, shook my clothes, smoothed my hair, and, finding that I had not lost my hat, recovered a portion of my self-respect. Then, feeling perfectly sobered, I regained without difficulty the way to the hotel of the Grand Monarque, telling myself that Madame Ouchafol would not fail to attribute my tardy return to some piece of good fortune. I had just time to make my toilet and swallow a cup of coffee; punctually at four o'clock handsome Lawrence knocked at my door. He had not slept; he had danced and sung all night; but he had not been intoxicated; he had kept his word. On leaving the wedding he had thrown himself into the river; this bath had refreshed and rested him: he prided

himself on swimming and diving like a duck. He was gay, lively, superbly handsome, and looked four years younger. I sincerely complimented him upon it, unable meanwhile to overcome the confusion which took possession of me when he remarked that my bed was not tumbled. Shame! I dared to answer that I had worked all night; happily the ass, sole witness of my disgrace, was incapable of revealing it.

Lawrence had eaten supper at two o'clock in the morning; he was neither hungry nor thirsty. For all baggage he had provided himself with a stick and a sketch-book, which he permitted me to look over. He drew very well, reproducing nature with boldness and fidelity. We crossed the fields, and soon ascended the long mountain by a path which, though steep, was delightful in its scenery and shadows.

Conversation really began only when we had reached the rugged crags where the Volpie plunges down and loses itself in a deep and angular abyss. It is a very beautiful little thing, difficult to approach for a good view.

We remained there some hours, and it was there that Lawrence revealed to me the *fearful mystery* of his existence.

I omit the conversation which gradually led to this confidence. He frankly confessed that he had felt for a long time a desire to open his heart to a man of sufficient liberality and culture to understand him. He fancied that I was such a man. I promised that he should not repent it, and he spoke as follows:—

STORY OF A ROLLING STONE.

I know that I am handsome; not only have I heard it said, but it has been said to me under circumstances which I shall never forget. Besides, I possess enough artistic cultivation to know what constitutes beauty, and I know that I am endowed with all the requisite qualities.

You will soon do justice to the lack of vanity with which it inspires me when you learn that it is the source of my greatest grief. I loved a woman who rejected me because I was not ugly.

You know that my name is Pierre Lawrence, and that I am the son of a peasant of this vicinity, now a nurseryman and kitchen-gardener. My father is the best of men, absolutely uneducated, which does not prevent me from adoring his goodness and amiability. My uncle is Baron Lawrence, a parvenu ennobled by Louis Philippe, and enriched by industry. He resides in Normandy in a fine old château, where I once visited him in my vacation, by the order of my father, who trusted to his remembrance and his promises. I know not whether he is selfish, whether he scorns the humble stock from which he sprang, or whether I had not the luck to please him. It is true that, leaving college imbued with new ideas, and afflicted with an ungovernable pride, I must have let him see that I did not come to him of myself; that I would sooner die than share his opinions and covet his property. In short, he asked me if I needed anything; I answered loftily that I needed nothing.

ing. He told me that I was a handsome lad because I resembled him, that he was glad to see me, and that he was going away to urge on his nomination as deputy. I returned to Paris, without unlocking my valise. That was seven years ago; I have never seen him since; I have never written to him. I am very sure that he will disinherit me; he is a bachelor, but he has a housekeeper. I bear him no ill-will on that account. I know that, save for his devotion to all the powers, he is a very worthy man, properly charitable. He owes me nothing. I have not the least reproach to bring against him. He earned his fortune himself; he is free to dispose of it to his liking.

My father does not take the thing so philosophically. If he made sacrifices for my education, it was in the hope that I should be a gentleman. That is not my fault. I asked no better than to be a peasant. I was happy in our humble station, and I always returned to it with regrets that I must leave it. My only pleasure now is to water the flowers and vegetables of our enclosure, to prune the trees, to wheel the barrow, and to force my old father to take a little rest.

I love the companions of my childhood. Their rustic fashions are far from distasteful to me; as far as I can shake off my troubles, it is with them that I attempt it. Singing and dancing, working and chatting, with these good people, these are my chief amusements. I abuse my strength a little; as much as I would wish to preserve it, to press on in pursuit of my dream, so much I

would wish to exhaust it, in order to forget it.

Everybody can tell you in the country hereabouts that I am very good-natured, very faithful, very discreet, and very devoted. Only, the bourgeois reproach me with having no ambition and no profession; as if it were not one to till the ground!

My father is very well off, according to his wants. He has twenty thousand francs invested, and I have never made him pay the smallest debt. As for me, I had inherited ten thousand francs from my mother. I have made way with nearly all of it.

After having passed my baccalaureate examination at Paris, and paid my respects to my uncle in Normandy, I came back here to ask my father what he wished me to do.

"You must return to Paris," he told me, "and become an advocate or magistrate there. You speak easily, you cannot fail to become a *great speaker*. Study law. I know that you will need ten thousand francs to live some years there. I will sell half my property. If I come to want when I am old, you will see that I do not lack for bread."

I refused my father's offer. I sacrificed my personal inheritance alone. He consented to it, and I went back to Paris, resolved to study hard, and to become a *great speaker*, to gratify my father, a little, also, for my own satisfaction. I know not what natural instinct impelled me to display myself, to extend or round my strong and flexible arms, to please myself with the sound of my powerful voice. How shall I explain it? A sort of exhibition of my natural

advantages seemed to me like a duty or a right, I know not which; but the ambition was not for nothing, as you will see.

There was still a Latin Quarter at this period. The students had not passed the Seine. They did not associate with young ladies; they still danced with grisettes, a species already beginning to disappear, and which since then has disappeared. That was in the beginning of 1848.

My constitution was too strong for me to fear to plunge boldly into work and pleasure. I speedily had friends. A strong, bold lad, generous and affectionate, good-tempered and noisy, always gathers a troop about him. We took part in every disturbance at ball or theatre, at the races or in the street.

I will not relate to you my adventures and my scrapes during the first year. I returned to the country for the holidays. I had studied well, and not spent too much. My father was in ecstasies with me, and said, "The Baron will be delighted."

My comrades in the faubourg were pleased with me, because I turned peasant again with them. The following winter, after the reopening of the school, a woman decided my life.

We attended all the first performances at the Odéon. We made a great noise over both those plays which we wished to support and those which we disliked. There was at that time a little actress at this theatre, who was styled *Impéria* on the poster. She played unnoticed, in what was called the *répertoire*. She was wonderfully pretty, ladylike, and cold,

either by nature, or from inexperience or timidity; the public did not trouble themselves about her. At that time one might play, for ten years, Molière's *Isabelles* or *Lucindes*, and the secondary rôles of tragedy, without attracting the public attention, or obtaining the least promotion, unless through influential protection.

This young girl had no acquaintance in the Ministry, no friend in the press; she did not even solicit the sympathy of the public. She spoke well; she had a modest grace; one perceived in her the conscientiousness of an artist, but no inspiration, no fervor, and not the shadow of coquetry. Her eyes never questioned the proscenium, and when, in obedience to the effect of her rôle, she cast them down, she did not let fall upon the orchestra that veiled and wanton glance, which seems to say, "I know very well what my rôle seems not to know."

I could not tell why, after having seen her with indifference in several minor parts, I was so struck by her proud and modest face, that between the acts I asked my companions if they did not think her charming. They pronounced her pretty, but not attractive on the stage. One of them had seen her play *Agnès*; he pretended that she had totally misunderstood this classical creation, and a discussion ensued. Was *Agnès* a sly-boots who assumes innocence, or a veritable child who says very forward things without fathoming their meaning? I supported the latter opinion; and although I cared little to be right, the first time that *L'École des Femmes* appeared upon the play-

bills I left the café Molière to see the piece. I don't know why I hesitated to mention it to any one. The students never listen to the repertory, which is nevertheless imposed upon them, in view of their instruction, at the Second Théâtre-Français. We are all supposed to know the classics by heart, and many declare themselves satiated with this antique feast who know only short fragments of it, and have never understood its wit or appreciated its merit.

I was like many others in this respect, and, at the end of several scenes, I felt almost a remorse for never having duly valued so admirable a masterpiece. We are romantic no longer; we are too sceptical for that; yet romanticism has penetrated into the air which we breathe; we have preserved its unjust and arrogant side, and we despise the classics, without rendering more justice to those which have superseded them.

In proportion as I relished the profound and humorous work of the old master, I was struck with the charm of the cruel Agnès: I say cruel, because Arnolphe is certainly an unhappy character, interesting in spite of his folly; he loves and is not loved in return! He is selfish in love; he is man. His suffering finds vent by snatches in admirable verses, which have, whatever they may say, an echo in the heart of every lover. In nearly all the plays of Molière there is a depth of heart-rending grief, which at a given moment effaces the absurdity of the jealous dupe. The stupid public does not suspect it. The actors who study their rôles are struck by it, and this deep shadow

troubles them; for if they obey the shadow's tearful sense, the stupid public comprehends nothing of it, fancies they parody the suffering, and laughs still more heartily. In the midst of this coarse laughter there are very few who whisper in their neighbor's ear that Molière is a wounded eagle, a soul profoundly sad. Nevertheless he is so, for I also have studied him, and in all his jealous husbands I perceive the misanthrope. Arnolphe is a humble Alceste, Agnès a rustic Célimène.

But Mademoiselle Impéria rendered Agnès interesting by the absolute good faith of her innocence, by certain accents not so much plaintive as energetic and indignant at oppression. While questioning if she were in the right, it was impossible not to be impressed and swayed by her face and attitude. That night I dreamed of her; the next day, under pretext of looking for old books, I walked along the galleries of the Odéon, always returning to the little trellised gate, where the employees of the theatre and the artists attending rehearsal go in and out: but in vain I watched and waited; they were rehearsing a new play in which Impéria had no part. All that I could gather from the words of those who came and went was that she was summoned to attend the rehearsal on the following day, the actress who played the part of Ingénue being indisposed and likely to be ill the day of the first performance. An urchin made his appearance, carrying a bulletin for her, and, as he held this little paper in the ends of his fingers, with an absent air, I followed him

with treacherous intent; I feigned to be abstracted as he; I jostled against him at the moment when he slipped past the coaches stationed by the theatre. The paper fell, I picked it up and returned it to him, after having wiped it on my sleeve, although it was not soiled. I had had time to read the address: "Mademoiselle Impéria, Rue Carnot, No. 17."

When the boy was setting off again I had a mind to give him five francs, and do the errand in his stead. I dared not.

Besides, I was intoxicated with my discovery as with a triumph. The first thing that a simple lover dreams of, is to know the address of his ideal, as if that brought him one step nearer to success!

However, I followed the little messenger at a distance. I saw him enter at No. 17, one of the poorest houses of this poor street, which was neither paved nor lighted with gas. I redoubled my steps, and met him as he came out, calling to the porter to deliver the note as soon as Mademoiselle What's-her-name returned.

Mademoiselle What's-her-name! Profanation! I knew nothing of that freedom which invariably characterizes the theatre, even serious theatres. I grew bolder; she was not there. I could learn something of her from the *concierge*. I entered resolutely under a sombre peristyle, and, in my turn, asked for Mademoiselle Impéria through the window.

"Out," bruskiy replied a fat old woman.

"When will she return?"

"I don't know."

And scanning me from head to foot with a half-contemptuous, half-good-humored air, she added, —

"Have you her permission to visit her?"

"Certainly," I answered, wretchedly disconcerted.

"Let us see!" rejoined the old woman, extending her hand.

I was about to withdraw; she detained me, saying, —

"Hark you, my young friend, you are one of those pretty fellows who fancy they have only to show themselves; they come every day, and that annoys this young actress, who is discreet as an angel. We are directed to tell these fine gentlemen that she receives no one. So don't take the trouble to come again; good evening, and success to you."

Laughing maliciously, she raised again with a loud slam the blind that she had let down to speak to me.

I retired, mortified and enchanted. Impéria was virtuous, innocent perhaps, as she appeared. I no longer laughed at myself for my fancy; I clung to it as to my life.

I will not tell you all the schemes that I devised to gain admittance to the theatre the next day. I dared not; but, the day after, seeing many people of every sort going in and out at this little entrance, which did not seem to be guarded, and which is never closed, I pushed on boldly and passed a tiny porter's box, of which a child had charge. I had seized the moment when two workmen were entering. I followed close upon their heels; the child, who was playing with a cat, hearing steps and

voices that he knew, did not even raise his eyes in my direction.

The workmen who preceded me ascended five or six steps, made a half-turn to the right, went up two or three steps more, which ended the principal staircase, pushed open a heavy swing-door, and disappeared. I stopped a moment irresolute. The child perceived me then, and cried out,—

"Whom do you want?"

"Monsieur Eugène!" replied I, entirely at random, and not knowing why this name rose to my lips rather than any other.

"Don't know him," replied the little fellow. "It is perhaps M. Constant that you mean?"

"Yes, yes, beg pardon! That's it! M. Constant."

"Go straight ahead!"

And he returned to his cat, whose face he was carefully cleaning with a woman's cap, probably his mother's.

What should I say to M. Constant, and who was M. Constant? I prepared to follow the workmen through the swing-door.

"Not that way!" cried the child again; "that is the stage!"

"I know that well enough, I found it!" replied I in an angry voice. "I have business there first."

He was nonplussed by my audacity. With two strides I gained the stage, attracted by the reassuring darkness which I had perceived there, and in which it took me some moments to make sure of my whereabouts.

I was at the back of the stage, and my first movement was to slip behind a curtain which I shall always

remember it—represented a strip of garden with enormous hydrangeas that I took at first for pumpkins. I stood there, palpitating and undecided, until my two machinists, passing close to me, and taking up two ropes with pulleys, said to me,—

"If you please, monsieur, step aside! make way for the *plantation*!"

They took away my refuge and my shelter. Two others, working in a contrary direction, uncoiled the roll which was to replace the garden by the back part of a room, and these cried to me in their turn,—

"Room for the *plantation*!"

The *plantation*! what did that mean? A guilty mind believes readily in direct allusions. I recalled the sign over the paternal enclosure: *Plantation of Thomas Lawrence!* and I imagined they were laughing at me. It was not so, however. The *plantation* at the theatre consists in placing curtains and whatever pieces of scenery are used at the rehearsal to show the arrangement of the scenery represented in the play, and to regulate the entrances and exits of the characters. If the scenery in the play is to be changed, the machinists, after each act of the rehearsal, alter or modify the *plantation*.

I took refuge on a great wooden staircase which ascended to the back of the stage behind the scenery, and I ventured to gain the platform above. I found myself face to face with a hairdresser who was combing a splendid peruke in the style of

Louis XIV., and who paid no attention to me. A voice issuing, I knew not whence, cried,—

"Constant!"

The hairdresser did not stir. It was not he. I breathed again.

"Constant!" cried another voice.

And some one opened at my right the padded door of a room furnished with red benches, which I judged to be the actors' green-room. The hairdresser moved then, for the person who appeared, and whom I dared not look at, seemed invested with the supreme authority.

"Monsieur Jourdain," said the artist in hair, "Constant is in that direction."

And turning to the left, he began calling in his turn,—

"Constant! The manager wants you."

I was caught between two fires,—the manager in person on one side, on the other this fantastic personage Constant, with whom I had pretended I wished to speak, and with whom I had not the least acquaintance. I retreated by the way I had come, and keeping always in the shadow, I precipitated myself into the left side-scene, where I tumbled over a fireman in undress uniform, who said to me with an oath,—

"Take care! Are you blind?"

As I very politely begged his pardon, and as he was concerned only in guarding against the danger of fire, he had no hesitation in telling me where I could find a refuge without troubling any one. He showed me a sort of flying bridge which descended from the stage to the orchestra, and which I cleared with

one leap, although it was very insecure.

The hall was as gloomy as the stage; I tried to sit down, and finding myself very uncomfortable, I ascertained that the seats in the stalls were tipped back, and that great bands of green cloth were stretched over the whole range of the orchestra. And then they illuminated something on the stage; several persons descended the flying staircase, and came towards me. I slipped away again. I reached the lobbies on the ground-floor, and catching sight of an open box, I crouched down there and kept still. There, unless by a fit of coughing or an unwary sneeze, I could not be discovered.

But how did that benefit me? In the first place, Impéria was not at rehearsal; her companion, the leading one in that line of character, was recovered, and performed her part without any prospect of being superseded. Impéria, her duties as substitute over, must be in the hall, studying the general effect, and listening to the suggestions that the author and the manager were making to the *ingénue*. But how distinguish and recognize any one in this immense hall, nearly empty and lighted only by three Argand lamps fastened to posts placed on the stage, and casting a greenish light with great shadows over the surrounding objects? This dim and smoky light, which a sharp ray of sunshine, falling from the frieze upon a projecting corner of the scenery, rendered still more deceptive, did not penetrate at all into the interior of the house.

The entire audience was composed of a dozen persons seated in the orchestra and with their backs to me. These were, perhaps, the manager, the costumer, the leader of the *claque*, one of the physicians; in short, people connected with the establishment, artists or employees, besides three or four women, one of whom must be the object of my aspirations; but how approach her? Certainly, strangers to the theatre were forbidden to intrude at the rehearsals, and I could not, without falsehood, claim acquaintance with any one; besides, my falsehood easily detected, I should be shamefully expelled, without having a right to demand any ceremony about it.

From time to time a noise of sweeping, shaking of carpets, and slamming of doors issued from the upper part of the hall. One of the persons seated in the orchestra cried: "Hush! silence!" and turning around seemed to examine everything with a piercing and angry glance that I fancied I felt falling on myself. I shrank up together; I held my breath. I dared not go out for fear of betraying my presence. At last this Cerberus, the manager, arose, interrupted the rehearsal, and declared that the clearing of the boxes and galleries must take place either before or after the rehearsals, since it was impossible to perform in the midst of this uproar and disturbance. Thus my last hope was taken from me, for I had conceived the idea of bribing one of these minor employees, and taking his place myself next day.

Another idea passed through my mind. Was it impossible to present myself as an actor? What I had witnessed of the rehearsal showed me how little the artist takes the initiative, and how his work is cut out for him. I had not the least idea of what is called the *mise en scène*, and the generality of spectators are quite as ignorant. They fancy, simply, that this admirable order, this dexterity of movement, this sureness of encounter, which are established on the stage, and which permit the interchange of cues, without apparent premeditation, are spontaneous effects, due to the intelligence of the actors or to the sequence of the scenes. That is not the case, however. Either ordinary actors lack intelligence, or they have too much, or they cannot bring out their points, or they are much occupied with producing an effect, and to that end willingly sacrifice probability of attitude and situation on the part of the other characters. This *mise en scène* is like military rule, which regulates the carriage, gesture, and face of each, even the most insignificant. One could chalk out upon the boards the space where each may move at a given moment, the number of steps which he must take, measure the extension of his arm in certain gestures, determine the exact place where an object is to fall, outline the *pose* of the body in the fictions of sleep, fainting, or falling in burlesque or dramatic performance. All this is regulated in the classic repertory by absolute traditions. In new productions these things demand long trials, experiments that are re-

jected or insisted on; hence ensue occasional stormy discussions, when the author, as a last resort, is chosen umpire, at the risk of committing an error, if he lacks judgment, taste, and experience. The actors—at least such as derive a certain authority from talent—join in the argument; they rebel against just or unjust exigencies. The inferior artists have no voice; they suffer and are silent. If they are awkward and ungraceful, effects which had been thought advisable have to be sacrificed, and what natural abilities they may possess turned to account; still, it is necessary to determine the use of these abilities, for they must change nothing during a hundred representations. The actor who improvises in performance runs a risk of killing the play: he disconcerts all his fellow-actors. They are put out, not only by an additional word, but by an unexpected gesture, an unlooked-for attitude. So the *mise en scène* is a collective operation; the actor has no more freedom in it than the soldier in his drill.

Perceiving this, I thought that the profession could certainly be learned very quickly, without special study or talent, since throughout you are taught and prompted; for I noticed also that they dictated and emphasized the intonations, syllable by syllable, to beginners, and even to those of more experience, when they mistook the meaning of a passage.

"Why," said I to myself, "should I not submit to this apprenticeship, even should it lead me to nothing beyond the happiness of approaching

her whom I love? I will make the attempt."

When my resolution was taken, I felt more comfortable in my concealment. Illusion gains ground readily in a mind of twenty. It already seemed to me as if I were a member of the company, belonged to the house, and had a right to be where I was.

When a project has entered my head, I have no rest until I have set about its execution. The rehearsal of the second act was finished; they left off there. A loud argument went on between the stage and the orchestra stalls upon the necessity of repeating these two acts next day, or beginning on the third. The manager rose, and turned toward the flying bridge to reascend the stage.

I seized this moment to quit my box, and spring coolly toward the entrance of the orchestra. I reached it at the same time with three women: one was tall and thin; another old and stout; the third was young, but it was not Impéria. So I had no other emotion to fear than that of contending with authority. I went back to the stage, and mingled boldly in a group surrounding the author and the manager. The latter insisted upon the necessity of cutting out a portion of the play. The author, crestfallen, consented unwillingly.

"Come into my study," said the manager, "we will arrange it at once."

In my great confusion I had not thought of recognizing this manager; everybody knew him, however; it was Bocage, the great actor Bocage himself. Since I was new to Paris, I had never seen him play, but his

noble figure was like one of the monuments of the place, and it needed but to be a student to love Bocage. He allowed us to sing the Marseillaise between the acts; and when we called for it, the orchestra gave it to us unhesitatingly. This continued till the day when the Marseillaise was decreed rebellious. Bocage resisted, and was removed.

The sight of him inspired me with an heroic courage. There was not a moment to lose. I approached him resolutely.

"What do you wish with me, sir?" asked he, with polite bluntness.

"I would like to speak to you five minutes."

"Five minutes! that's a long time, I can't spare it."

"Three minutes! two!"

"And one has passed already. Wait for me a quarter of an hour, in the green-room."

He went out and I heard him saying, "Constant, who is that tall fellow that you have admitted to the stage?"

"A tall fellow?" repeated Constant, who was in fact the *concierge* *factotum* of the Odéon.

"Yes, a very handsome fellow."

"Upon my word, I know nothing about it. Who let him in?"

"Say it was I," called out the leading young comedian, the Frontin of the troupe, as he passed by me with a careless air.

He came into the green-room. Bocage had only crossed it. Constant, summoned and beset by five or six other persons, and replying to their demands and questions with the coolness of a man accustomed to

live in a tumult, went out by another door. For one moment I found myself alone with the comedian adored by the public.

"May I really," said I to him, "make use of your name?"

"The deuce!" cried he, without noticing me. And he vanished, calling to the hair-dresser: "My wig, Thomas, my wig for this evening!"

I was left alone in a low, oblong apartment, adorned with portraits of authors and celebrated actors, but taking heed of nothing, and counting the beatings of my agitated heart. When the clock struck five, I had waited three quarters of an hour. The movements and noises in the theatre died gradually away; every one had gone to dinner. I dared not move a step; the manager had surely forgotten me.

At last Constant reappeared, napkin in hand. He had remembered me in the midst of his meal, the excellent man!

"M. Bocage is still there," he said; "will you speak to him?"

"Certainly," replied I.

And he conducted me into one of the director's studies, where I found myself in the presence of Bocage. The great artist looked at me with a kindly glance which did not lack penetration, showed me a seat, begged me to wait a moment, gave five or six orders to Constant in less than a minute, wrote a few lines on half a dozen sheets of paper, and, when we were alone, asked me what I wished, in a tone which, although very pleasant, indicated "Make haste."

"I would like to enter the theatre."

He regarded me again.

"You certainly would not make a bad figure there. A fine young *premier*! From whom do you come?"

"I have no recommendation."

"Then you are not from the Conservatory?"

"No, monsieur, I am a law student."

"And you wish to forsake a career where your relatives doubtless —"

"I do not mean to leave it, Monsieur Bocage; I am an industrious student, although I love pleasure. I count on pursuing my studies and being received as an advocate; after that I shall see."

"You think, then, that one needs no special study to prepare for the stage?"

"I have tried none. I can, however, attempt it."

"Then do so, and come to see me again. I can judge at present only of your exterior."

"Is it sufficient?"

"More than sufficient. The voice is fine, the pronunciation excellent. You appear easy in your movements."

"Is that all that is necessary?"

"O no, certainly not! You must study. I engage you to begin."

"Since you are so good, so patient, as to grant me a moment's attention, tell me what I must do?"

He considered a moment, and replied, "You must see a great deal of acting. Do you attend the theatres?"

"About like the other students."

"That is not enough. Stay, your face pleases me, but I don't know you. Bring me proof to-morrow that you are a very well-behaved lad, and you shall have your entrances, not only into the house, but also to the stage,

that you may follow the performance of the repertory; that is all I can do for you at present. I need not tell you that if you lack discretion and propriety in the relations which may be established between yourself, the artists, and the employees, I cannot prevent your being immediately put out."

"I will bring you proof to-morrow that you have nothing to fear. I should be a wretch, if I made you repent of your kindness to me!"

He felt the sincerity of my emotion; tears of joy and gratitude trembled on my eyelashes. He extended his hand to me, and took his hat, saying, "To-morrow, at this same hour."

I hastened at once in search of everybody with whom I was acquainted. Without revealing to them my love for an actress, I told them that I could obtain admission to the theatre, if they would give a good account of me. In two hours I had a list of more than twenty signatures. My landlord, my tailor, my shoemaker, and my hatter attested with equal enthusiasm that I was a *charming young man, irreproachable in every respect*. My comrades did still better. They insisted on accompanying me, the student-card in their hats, to the manager's. They were not admitted; Constant was on guard; but Bocage saw them from the window, smiled at them in reply to their salutations, and signed my complete admission into the establishment. It was a great favor, granted to a few young actors only, and as yet I was nothing.

That same evening I attended the

performance. Alas! Impéria did not play till Friday; but I resolved, to strike up a friendship with the actors of my age, and gain a footing in the green-room, to be sure of meeting her there.

Naturally enough, I went to thank the young comedian for the protection he had offered me. He knew my adventure already. He had seen the sort of ovation that had recommended me to the confidence of Bocage. He presented me to his comrades as a *warranted candidate*, fired off a thousand dazzling witticisms, and left me nonplussed at this theatrical brilliancy, beside which the wit of students in their second year is still very dull, tame, and provincial.

By the end of three days I was quite at home there, save that I perceived all I lacked to be in tune with the spirit of the house. I realized that this position of supernumerary on tolerance gave me no right to take liberties. I shrank from deserving the least reproach on the part of a manager who had so generously opened the door to me. So I imposed upon myself a politeness and reserve so much the easier that, feeling my inferiority, I could not have shone in pleasantry. I must say, also, that generally the actors were people of good-breeding and polished manners; without stiffness or affectation, they had the air of the best society, and it is certain that I learned still more from hearing them converse between the acts than from seeing them perform. Two or three had, however, a way of talking rather freely, but they refrained from it before the women: all knew how to

respect the stage, whatever might be their private manners elsewhere.

So I received there lessons in deportment, and that simplicity of manner which is the stamp of good-breeding. All these persons had learned by precept the customs of good society, and they would have appeared, in the highest circles, quite as fine gentlemen as on the stage. They had fallen into the habit of being so. There was no difference now, even in their moments of careless merriment, between the characters that they had just been representing and those they really were. I comprehended all I lacked to be a well-bred man; love suggested to me the desire to please. I was almost glad not to have to meet the gaze of Impéria yet; and, not to delay the metamorphosis which I had determined on, I left the smoking-room, I gave up billiards, I disappeared from the *Closerie*, and devoted all the time I did not spend at the theatre to my legal and literary studies. My friends complained of me; they had never seen me so serious and orderly.

Friday came at last. During five days that I had been sure of meeting her, of speaking to her, perhaps, I had not once dared to utter Impéria's name, and, whether through chance or indifference, no one around me had made the least mention of her. Phèdre was on the programme; Impéria's name was there also. She played Aricie. I had already learned to dress properly with my modest wardrobe. I passed an hour at my toilet. I looked at myself in the glass, like a woman. I asked myself

hundred times if my face, which had pleased Bocage and Constant, might not displease her. I forgot my dinner. I passed under the galleries of the Oddon before the gas was lighted. I was in mortal fear, even while a delirious joy made me dizzy.

At last the hour arrived. I entered the green-room. No one there yet, it an old woman accompanying a tall slender girl clad in Greek costume, who looked at herself in the glass with a frightened air, and declared that she was going to faint. I bowed, and seated myself on a bench. I wondered if this dress and these white fillets were not the somewhat careful toilet of a supernumerary. CEnone arrived in her scarlet tunic, covered with a large fawn-colored peplum. She sat down in an arm-chair, her feet upon the fender, and exclaimed, —

"What infernal weather!"

The elder *tragediennes* frequently copy the dashing and military style of the Empire, which Mademoiselle Georges affected. Comedy imparts dignity to the deportment; tragedy, which deals with the superhuman, produces by reaction a desire to return as far as possible to reality.

The old woman in tartan, who accompanied the young Greek, made a deep reverence to CEnone, begging her to give a glance to her daughter's toilet.

"What!" cried the nurse of Phédre, "does she act Aricie to-night?"

"For the first time, Madame Régina. She is very much afraid, my poor child! As for me, I tell her it is a lucky chance that Mademoiselle

Impéria is ill; were it not for that —"

"Impéria ill?" cries Theseus, entering; "so much the worse! Is it serious?"

"It would seem so!" replies the mother; "for Mademoiselle Impéria would not resign her part for a trifle."

Hypolite enters in his turn.

"Did you know that little Impéria was ill?"

"I have just been told so. It would even appear that it is serious."

"What then," says CEnone; "what is the matter with the child?"

"There is the doctor," says Thiramine; "what is the matter with our Aricie?"

"I fear a typhoid fever," replies the doctor.

"The deuce! Poor little thing! It is too bad! Have you seen her to-day?"

"Two hours ago."

"It must have come on suddenly, since we knew nothing of it," continues CEnone.

"So suddenly," says the mother of the new Aricie, "that my girl could not even have a rehearsal."

"She thinks only of her daughter, that woman!" says CEnone, rising.

"As for me, I am greatly distressed. Impéria is poor, without family, without support of any kind, you know. I wager that there is not so much as a cat with her, and not twenty francs in her little purse! Gentlemen, ladies, we will club together between the acts, and as soon as I am dead I shall hasten to the invalid's. Who will come with me

to assist me in watching with her, if she is delirious?"

"I!" cried I, pale, and unable to contain myself longer.

"Who! you!" said CEnone, regarding me with an air of astonishment.

"Ladies and gentlemen, they are beginning!" cried the call-boy, ringing his bell.

This sudden interruption warded off the attention that would otherwise have been attracted by my confusion and my despair. I ran to the house of Impéria. In the door-keeper's box there was only a deaf old man; who understood at last that I was inquiring for the young actress, and who replied to me, —

"It seems she is not very well: my wife is with her."

I sprang toward the staircase, calling out to him that I came from the physician at the theatre. He pointed to the back of the passage, and a half-opened door on the ground-floor. I passed through two small rooms, very poorly furnished, but exquisitely neat, which overlooked a bit of garden, and found myself face to face with the portress, to whom I repeated the lie I had just been telling her husband.

She recognized me directly, and said to me with a shake of her head, —

"Are you telling me another fib?"

"How should I know that Mademoiselle Impéria is ill, if I did not come from the theatre?"

"What is the physician's name?"

I gave it.

"I begin to believe you. After all, in her present state — Come in with me."

She opened the door which she had held half shut behind her, and I followed her; but when I stood within that chamber, where, oppressed with fever, the poor young actress lay sleeping on a child's bed, I was seized with fear and penitence. It seemed to me as if I were outraging a death-agony, and I dared neither to approach nor look at her.

"Ah well! feel her pulse!" said the good woman. "See if the fever increases. She is not conscious. Come!"

I must either feel her pulse, or renounce my physician's rôle. I must lift up this poor, helpless arm, and take in my own this little hand, burning with fever. Nothing more harmless than this examination, surely, but I was not a medical student; I could do nothing for her. I had no right to impose my devotion on her. If she should open her eyes and see her hand in that of a stranger, she so cold and shy, her illness would be augmented through my fault. While making these sad reflections, I looked mechanically at a photograph placed on the little table: it was the picture of a man neither young nor handsome, a relative, doubtless, perhaps her father. It seemed to me as if the refined and gentle face reproached me. I retreated from the bed, and decided to tell the truth to the young girl's humble guardian.

"I am not a physician!"

"Ah, you see! I suspected it!"

"But I am connected with the theatre, and I know that the artists are anxious about the loneliness of their young comrade, about her

poverty also. They are going to get up a collection, and one of the ladies proposes to watch with her. Having nothing to do this evening, and fearing lest you might be embarrassed, I bring you my share. I see that you are devoted to her, and your face tells me that you are good and honest. Let her want for nothing. Care for her as if she were your daughter; they will assist you. As for me, I will come again only when I am summoned; I have no right to offer my services."

"But you are in love with her, like so many others, are you not? It is not a crime. You, too, look good and honest. I will permit you to inquire for her at the lodge. That is all. You are too young for a husband: she will not have a lover; and it is not I who will counsel her to commit a folly. Come, retire and be tranquil. Whether they bring me money or not, whether they aid me or not, she shall be cared for like my daughter, as you say; it was very pretty, but it was unnecessary. Good by! Take back your money. I have some myself, if the little one needs it."

I dared not return to the theatre; I felt that I should be questioned and betray myself. In the state in which I had left poor Impéria, I could not assume a careless air, nor invent a fresh falsehood.

Besides, I was tired of lying, and I blushed at my artifices. Sincerity is the foundation of my character.

To reconcile my conscience and my love, I resolved in reality to devote myself to the stage. Hitherto I had not seriously weighed the question; now I no longer asked myself

if my love would be sufficiently lasting to lead me to marriage. This honest old woman, who had just put the case so simply to me, had touched the root of the matter. I was not, perhaps, too poor to marry a girl who had nothing, but I was too young to give her confidence in me. I had no profession; the theatre alone could furnish me with one offhand, if I knew how to turn to account my natural gifts. Only a few months might have to pass before I should be suitably remunerated; and even if I had to wait several years, what difference did it make, if Impéria loved me, and deigned to betroth herself to me?

I did not forget my father in the midst of my dream. The darling wish of this dear good man was to see me become a *fine speaker*. He meant by that, an advocate or deputy; the thing was not very clear in his mind: but he could have no prejudice against the theatre; he did not know what it was. I do not believe that he ever entered a playhouse in his life. I possessed an influence over him that grew stronger every year. I did not despair of making him understand that, when one is a fine speaker, it is sometimes better to recite the fine things that others have written, than to utter one's own folly.

Thus reflecting, I hurried through the neighboring quarter. I ran along the Rue Notre Dame des Champs, I traversed the garden of the Luxembourg, the Rue de l'Ouest, the Rue Vavin, and returned to the poor Rue Carnot, awaiting, in the shadow, the arrival of Enone, and at ten o'clock

I saw her enter in company with another woman. These ladies, as later I became aware, knew Impéria very slightly; but they were kind-hearted. With very few exceptions, all actors are so. Whatever may be their faults, their passions, their vices even, they have a mutual charity and devotion that are admirable. I have reason to know that no other profession admits of such compassionate and brotherly love.

I passed the night in wandering about like a restless shade, through the wind and rain. Day had hardly dawned when I knocked timidly at No. 17. The door was opened to me at once, and I saw the good portress, who addressed me with a smile: "Already up? Come, you care a great deal for her, it would seem. Comfort yourself, for she is much better. She has recognized her companions, and the fever has left her. I have just been taking a nap, and am going back to her. Those ladies will come back again at noon."

"May I come and inquire at eleven?"

"Yes, but if she is out of danger, you will leave us in peace, won't you?"

I went away, and threw myself on my bed.

At eleven Madame Romajoux — that was the name of the portress — told me that the physician had been there. He had said, "It will be nothing serious; we need have no fear for her. Let her stay in for five or six days; that is all."

When I heard Madame Romajoux's name, I said to her, seizing a pretext to prolong the conversation,

that either she or her husband must be from Auvergne.

"So we are, both," replied she; "and you?"

"I am from Arvers."

"And we from Volvic; that is far enough. What is your name?"

I told her at random a name that was not mine.

"What are your parents?"

"They are peasants."

"Like us. But say, then, my countryman, you are of the same rank as we, and you aspire to this young lady?"

"She is an actress; I am studying for an actor; and I suppose she is not a prince's daughter."

"There's where you mistake. Perhaps there are princes in her family. She is a noble young lady."

"Whose name is?"

"I shall not tell you. She conceals her name. She works at the theatre and at home, to pay her father's board, who is — who is incurable and in destitution; but enough of this. You are drawing me out, and I ought not to tell you what she has confided to me. Come, forget this pretty girl. She is not for your handsome eyes, and I suppose that you might turn her from her duty. Would you be very proud of having made a precious little pearl fall into the gutter? If you have a heart, leave her in peace."

"I respect her so much that I beg you will not mention me to her."

"Have no fear! I do not wish to have her ruined, and I say nothing to her of all the money I refuse, and all the gallants I send away."

"Continue, my dear countrywo-

man, continue! you are an adorable woman."

She began to laugh; but the hour was approaching when the physician might surprise me there; so I withdrew, and went to the rehearsal. They had begun on the third act, and were changing the arrangement of the scenery. There was a respite of quarter of an hour for the actors.

"Ah! there he is!" cried Madame Régine, when she saw me enter the greenroom; "inform us, my young friend, how you came to know our Impéria."

"I! I do not know her," answered I. "I have never spoken a word to her."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"But you are in love with her?"

"Why so?"

"You offered to watch with her, as if you were her brother or— He blushes, gentlemen! See how he blushes!"

"One blushes easily, and for no special reason, at my age; particularly when questioned by a person of talent like yourself."

"Thanks, you are very polite: what next?"

"Next, next! You said before me that this young lady was poor, respectable, without family; you spoke of fever, of delirium. Her misfortune, and, more particularly, your devotion, touched, affected me. I volunteered, without thinking of the impropriety of my first impulse; and that is all."

She looked me in the face mischievously, and added: "Is it true

that you obtained admittance here to fit for the stage, on her account?"

I was sure of myself this time, and I replied in a manner to convince her.

The subject was dropped. They talked of Impéria; they esteemed her greatly, although, outside the theatre, they did not know her; but they appreciated her good-breeding, her deference to advice, her modesty and pride.

"Is it true, really true," asked some one, "that she is the star of purity that she seems?"

"I am certain of it," responded Madame Régine. "If you had seen that poor little house, so neat, so modest and retired! Besides, you know what Bellamare told us of his pupil?"

"Yes; she was seventeen when he brought her here, but she is eighteen now."

"Ah well, it's all the same," replied Régine. "Truly, I will not answer for it that when she is twenty—"

They were interrupted by the commencement of the play, and they descended to the stage. I remained alone in the greenroom with the leader of the orchestra, an excellent and very intelligent man, who was reading over the manuscript of the first acts, to see where he should have to put some musical phrases. He was very kind and fatherly with me; I ventured to ask him who was this Bellamare, and, as this personage will play an important part in my narrative, I invite your attention to the details which were given me.

"Bellamare?" said the leader of

the orchestra; "you have never heard of Bellamare? He is a friend of the establishment, a former actor of ours. He played the comic rôles, and had a good deal of talent, but he spoke through his nose, and his voice was not equal to so large a stage. He met with great success in the provinces. Here the public tolerated him, but would not adopt him, so that after a few years he returned to the province with a troupe which he had recruited and trained according to his fancy. He has conducted his affairs, sometimes successfully, sometimes the reverse, but always with so much delicacy and generosity that he has acquired for himself a thorough respect; and when he is sinking he invariably finds friendly and trusting hands to set him afloat again. He has continued on terms of friendship with us all; and every year, when we are closing, he comes to see us, in order to engage those artists who are out of employment, to go about the province with him. Those whom he cannot himself employ he advises, recommends, and finds occupation for them. Whoever comes from Bellamare is well received everywhere. In short, he is an authority and a celebrity in the profession. And now I think of it, what you had better do, when you have profited a little by what you see here, is to ask Bellamare to bring you out somewhere. If you can prevail on him to attach you to his company, you will find him a valuable adviser, a professor of the first order, in serious even more than in comic drama; for if Nature has denied him in some respects, intellect has made up for it,

and he is perhaps the ablest master who exists. He sees at a glance all that can be done with a subject; and when he procured an engagement for little Impéria here last year, he told the manager: 'She will be correct, but cold, this first year. I will take her again next vacation, and will return her better. The third year you would not let her go, and you will give her a salary of ten thousand francs.'

"And meanwhile?" said I.

"She earns eighteen hundred, which is very insufficient for a virtuous girl who has relatives to support; but it is all a *débütante* can expect. Fortunately she is very courageous and very skilful. While learning her rôles, she makes beautiful thread-lace that the ladies buy very willingly. They know that she is poor; and truly, although they may not be very straitlaced here, one cannot help admiring them. Of course they know this probably will not last, since poverty almost always ends by overcoming principle, that a day will come when the desire for rest and amusement will gain the victory."

"Unless some honorable artist comes forward to marry her."

"That is a possibility like any other. I wager now, that you would think of it, if you had a profession and were ten years older."

"Maestro," I said to him, "they pretend that youth is the finest period of life."

"It is a generally received opinion."

"For my part I think that opinion lacks common sense. At my

age, whenever one is supposed to form any plan whatever, everybody hastens to cry out, 'You are too young!'

And I left him, cursing my beautiful youth, swearing at the same time that I would attach myself to Bellamare as to an anchor.

Three days later, as I was entering this same greenroom, I trembled to see Impéria seated near the fire, awaiting the end of the second act of rehearsal, in order to take part in the third. The poor child still looked pale and worn. Her little cloak was very thin, and her shoes very wet. She dried them with a calm and indifferent air, her eyes fixed upon the coals, which were not burning very brightly. I summoned Constant to rekindle the fire. She thanked him, without perceiving that the motion had originated with me.

"Ah well," said Constant to her, "so you are better? Do you know that you are changed? Are n't you going out too soon?"

"I must do my duty, Monsieur Constant," she answered, in that pure and vibrant voice which thrilled me to the heart.

She took up her embroidery, and began to work at that marvellous lace that she made so quickly and so well. I watched her in profile, for I dared not move a step to look at her front face. She was ten times prettier by daylight than by gas-light. Her skin was of a lustrous delicacy; her long brown eyelashes caressed her cheeks; her beautiful bright chestnut hair was knotted upon her white, firm neck, where waved a cloud of tiny curls, escaped from their con-

finement. She was smaller than I had supposed, decidedly *petite*, but so well proportioned and so elegant in outline, that she had seemed much taller on the stage; her feet and hands, her pretty little mouth, were masterpieces.

I happened to cough, for I had almost caught a pleurisy from passing the night out of doors, during her fever. She turned around as if surprised, and as she returned my bow her eyes had a cold or distrustful expression that seemed to say, "What is this gentleman?" But her attention was not especially attracted by a new face more or less; she bent her eyes again upon her work, and I had no cause to hope that my countenance had struck her.

I took my courage in both hands, as the saying goes. I pretended to look at the portrait of Talma, hung on one side of the mantel-piece. I approached it, but I almost turned my back to it; and then I fancied she was about to leave her seat, in order to withdraw from my proximity. I did not wish to see her movement of retreat accomplished, and coughing again, this time to keep myself in countenance, I went out by the door which led to the stage. I was about to take a seat in the orchestra, when I heard M. Bocage say to the director, pointing to the *ingénus* who was rehearsing: "Léon, that little thing won't do at all; she is impossible! At the end of this act we must remove her. Impéria might not be more spirited, but she would not be awkward and vulgar. Is she not well yet?"

"I believe not,"

"Make inquiries."

I ventured to say that Mademoiselle Impéria was in the greenroom.

"And why the devil does she stay there?—My dear boy," added he, addressing himself to me, "have the kindness to tell her that we desire her presence in her own interest."

I went with one bound from the stage to the greenroom. I performed my errand in so humble a manner, that she was astonished, and could not restrain a slight smile.

"Yes, monsieur," she replied, "I will have the goodness to obey."

She put her work into her pocket, and took a seat at the entrance of the orchestra. Bocage bowed to her, and she responded by a salutation at once dignified and respectful. Summoning me with another nod, he passed me his fur foot-warmer.

"That child is still unwell," he said to me; "give her that."

I almost knelt to place the fur beneath Impéria's feet. She thanked me with the ease of a woman accustomed to attention, and thanked the manager with another bow. She received this charity as a gracious princess receives the homage which is hers of right. I was struck by the calm and firm expression of her face; I was even awed by it. She had no need to study the other actors, to acquire noble and simple manners; she might have taught them all the lesson. How awkward and insignificant I felt before her!

While the *ingénue* was wading through the last scene in the act, the impatient manager, after exchanging a few words with the author, drew near Impéria.

"Notice what fault they find with your companion. The rôle is to be taken away from her. Be ready to rehearse it to-morrow."

Impéria made no reply, but a tear trickled over her cheek.

"Ah well, what is it?" asked the manager.

"O monsieur, I have never yet had to wound any one's feelings!"

"You must get used to that, my child; that is the way of the theatre!"

The next day she replaced Mademoiselle Corinne, who declared herself her implacable enemy.

The play went off better and more briskly. I observed that when they wished Impéria to add a little warmth to her unimpassioned acting, they always addressed her with extreme deference, and that in those passages which brought out her good qualities they gave her great encouragement. Evidently, they had a respect for her beyond her age and position. She owed it to her politeness and amiability, which awoke esteem and interest at the same time. In the greenroom, this secret influence was still more perceptible. Actors are children, sometimes rebellious, capricious, and passionate; but they are impressionable children, nice observers, most sensitive instruments, that a breath sets all a-quiver. Merciless and cruel in their condemnation, they yield equally to their enthusiasm; and it often happens that two irreconcilable enemies applaud each other rapturously, beneath the spell of a sincere admiration. They have the freedom of opinion which belongs to irresponsible vir-

tuos. The unconcern of their intellectual life vibrates between the extremes of generosity and cruelty. Obligated to speak whatever falls to their part, whether good or bad, so they yield to every feeling, infatuation as well as contempt.

Impéria was appreciated then; and when she was brought in contact with the company for the first time, in a new play, — always a source of great excitement, both for those who *are* in it and those who *wish to be*, — they were convinced of that purity of soul and nobility of nature which they had ascribed to her, but hitherto had had no opportunity of proving. They were interested in her, and constrained her to talk with them by addressing her as she deserved to be addressed; they took especial pains to become acquainted with her, and when she passed through the greenroom, in the midst of a rather excited discussion, the young Frontin would exclaim, "Hush, gentlemen, the angel is passing!"

At length, seeing her free from all suspicion, I dared to take part in the conversations carried on with her and the other women. I always addressed myself, however, to some one else. She was the last to whom I ventured to speak; but destiny drew me on, and, in spite of myself, my first words to her were a declaration.

They were discussing marriage, in connection with the publication of the banns of a young tragedian belonging to the company, who was about to marry a young and beautiful soubrette.

"They are right, these children," said one.

"Utter folly!" said another.

And as each one volunteered an opinion on the advantages and the cares of a family, my friend Frontin appealed to me.

"And the handsome supernumerary," said he, "the 'warranted aspirant,' what does he think of it?"

"O," replied I, "I am a child; I have the confidence of my age; I do not see why a man should not wed the woman he loves."

"That is very pretty," said Régine; "but since at your age he loves all women, he would have a great many marriages on his hands."

"At my age," replied I, desperately, addressing Impéria, who was smiling, "one loves but one woman —"

"At a time, perhaps!" responded Régine; "but, to a dead certainty, you take the first who passes under your nose for your ideal."

"The ideal? There is no such thing!" said the stout personage who played the financial rôles, addressing the logician.

The logician here put in a speech that seemed to be borrowed from his repertory. By dint of reasoning upon the stage, he had become very fluent. He affirmed that the ideal was a relative thing, which issued full-armed from the brain of every individual, the visible result of those allurements to which his temperament rendered him susceptible.

"I knew," said he, "a man of refined intellect, and exquisite appearance, whose ideal was a stout woman well versed in culinary matters. At

your age," added he, turning to me, "it is quite the contrary. Then one loves ethereal women, who live only on dew."

"Don't defend yourself," cried the young comedian, "a young *premier* should be like that. He must cut his bread in thin slices and dip it into a rosebud, for his breakfast, nothing delicate or perfumed enough for Lindor or Célio; also nothing less suited to the cares of a household. Hence you do not see *Cinthio del Sole* occupied in washing his little monkey's faces. No, the *access*, he who is always on fire with love, is too handsome, too nice, and too beribboned, to fall into the grease of the soup-pot! — What says the discreet Impéria?"

"What?" said Impéria, who had not been attending to the question; "of what are you speaking?"

"Regard the shepherd Paris, who contemplates you blushing," replied the comedian, pushing me before her. "How do you find him?"

"Very well bred, always!" answered Impéria, without raising her eyes to me. "That is all I know of monsieur."

"He is always so?" went on Frontin; "you could not say as much for me!"

"I have no more to complain of in you than in the others."

"She is a Jesuit! she detests me! Come, I will remodel myself! The aspirant shall give me lessons; he shall make me rehearse the morning salutation, the presentation of the arm-chair, the manner of picking up work that has fallen, and replacing the needles in it without breaking off

the point; for he knows how to do all those things, the *aly boots*!"

"I should know how to be still more devoted," I replied, "and in earnest perhaps!"

"Devote yourself even to the death, would you not?" rejoined Frontin with emphasis.

And as Impéria, surprised at last, regarded me with some attention, I repeated, "Even to the death," with an accent of passionate conviction that made her tremble slightly.

"The shot is fired!" cried Frontin; "the arrow is sped, straight to the heart!"

"To whose heart?" she asked, with a discouraging composure.

"To the only heart still free that I know of in the company."

"Mine? how do you know it, Monsieur ——?"

"Ah! it is not so; pardon! I did not suppose — They said — See how deceitful women are, and how the Agneses deceive you!"

"I am not an Agnes. No one tyrannizes over me."

"But Horace —"

"I know no Horace"

"Come!" exclaimed Régine, "tell us the truth, *petite*! You are virtuous; still, you are not a prude, and you have not reached eighteen without a preference for some one?"

I was ready to faint, and they commented on my pallor. Impéria had the implacable cruelty of virtue, and replied, with a smile: —

"You wish to know? Ah well, I do not care to conceal it. Very far away from here there is some one that I love most sincerely."

I know not if they were inquisitive,

nor how she parried them; I rushed out precipitately, and went to take counsel with my despair under the chestnuts of the Luxembourg.

What a wound, what a fall, what anger, and what grief! I can laugh now at the cause, but my heart still bleeds at remembrance of the effect.

It was so serious that I was alarmed by it myself. Was I mad then? How and why had I fallen in love, to such a degree, with a person whom I had known only a few days, and to whom I had just spoken for the first time? What did I know of her, after all? Why had I taken it into my head that I must touch her fancy first, and please her at first sight?

As I went back through the alley of the Observatory I encountered Léonce, one of our young actors, a pretty lad, but very wild and a very poor player; whom I could easily have superseded in a twinkling, had I been treacherously disposed. He had a sad and gloomy air.

"Ah! my dear Lawrence," cried he, almost throwing himself into my arms, "if you knew how I suffer!"

"Why so? What is the matter?"

"She loves some one!"

"She, who?"

"Impéria! She has just said so, with an air of bravado, before us all!"

"I know that very well: I was there!"

"You were there? Stay, it is true, it was in connection with you; but it was not on your account that she spoke in that way! It was because of me, to discourage me."

"You love her then?"

"Madly."

I had known nothing of it, and in that respect I was as vain as he, who fancied himself the only aspirant. I refrained from opening my heart to him, and feigned to pity him, delighted to find some one with whom I could talk of *her*. He had loved her ever since her arrival at the Odéon; he had come from the Conservatory, she from the province; and he had made inquiries, and kept up an untiring search, until he knew the real origin, the true history, of Impéria. He had sworn to himself that he would never betray the secrets thus surprised, and here he was relating them to me,—to me whom he had known about eight days, and whom he now called "thou" for the first time.

Impéria's name was Nancie de Valcloe. She was from Dauphiny. Her father, the Marquis de Valcloe, was an intelligent man, generous, and highly esteemed in his province. He adored his wife, who was very beautiful, and took charge himself of the education of his daughter, in whom he felt a pardonable pride. Madame de Valcloe, who had never given occasion for remark, had suddenly, at forty, a horribly scandalous affair with an officer of the garrison. The husband killed the lover; the wife committed suicide. Three months later M. de Valcloe became insane, after having lost all his fortune in an absurd enterprise, to which he had been driven by his impatience to realize his property, in order to expatriate himself with his daughter.

"Mademoiselle de Valcloe thus found herself virtually orphaned at

the age of twenty; for she deceives us," observed Léonce in the midst of his recital. "She is twenty-two. She conceals her age, to disguise her identity by all possible means; she could as well assume that she is even younger than she is. So perfect a face has no age."

He continued: "As M. de Valclos had been cheated on the eve of a clearly established insanity, and when he was probably already deranged, his daughter might have had recourse to law, and regained at least some fragments of her patrimony. When advised to do so, she coldly refused. Her mother's adventure, the cause of her father's madness, had made too much noise for her to remain in ignorance of it, and she could not bring forward a suit without alluding to that cause. She let herself be stripped of her entire fortune; and when she was certain that there was not left her even the means of supporting her unhappy father, she resolved to earn her living.

"Although she had talent and education, she found no immediate resource, and she made a secret resolution. Bellamare, the *impresario*—an excellent man, of whom you must have heard us speak—had given representations at various times in the town where she resided. In the happy days of the De Valclos family he had even had the direction of private theatricals at the château de Valclos. He had spent several days there, had taken a part himself, and had brought out the little Nancie, then twelve years old, before her friends and relatives. He found she possessed such ability, that he said,

laughingly, before her, 'It is a great pity that she is wealthy. There is the making of an artist in her.'

"The child had never forgotten these words. The poor young lady recalled them, and hastened to Bellamare, who was playing at Besançon. She needed not to tell him her sad story: he knew it. He told her all an honorable man could tell a virtuous girl about the theatre. It did not alarm her. It even appears that she replied to him: 'I am invulnerable. The memory of our misfortunes and our anguish is branded on my soul, as with a red-hot iron. Never shall I be tempted to commit an indiscretion.'

"Bellamare yielded, swore to be a father to her, and, not wishing to depart with her from a place where she was known, appointed a rendezvous for her in Belgium, where she made her *début* under the name of Impéria, and where no one suspected the mystery of her life. In Dauphiny they did not know what had become of her. They heard that she had conducted her father from Lyons to the residence of an old domestic, thoroughly devoted to him, who took care of him like a child. He is not violent, it seems. He has entirely lost his memory, and to make him regain it would be doing him no service. They believe that Mademoiselle de Valclos has gone to Russia, in the capacity of governess. Here they have discovered nothing. It is only Father Bocage who knows all, and myself, who have learned all—alas! shall I confess it?—by listening at the door! Because I am mad, you see! Because to win her I am

capable of anything: because— But all is lost! She is, she will be, always virtuous, it is true, but she loves another!"

"Who do you think it is?" I asked Léonce, pretending to be interested in his sorrow.

"Ah! who can tell?" cried he, gesticulating wildly; "she said *some one very far off*. Perhaps he is an artist whom she knew in Brussels; perhaps a nobleman to whom she was betrothed in Dauphiny, before her misfortunes."

"If he is a nobleman, he acts like a villain in leaving her to perform the hard work that she does. Doubtless he is rich, and has forgotten her! When she is sure of it, she will forget him likewise!"

"Yes, you give me some hope. Thank you for it! And then I say to myself also, that perhaps she has invented this love to put mine to the test."

"Then she knows you love her?"

"Certainly. I have written it to her several times, in the most persuasive and respectful terms!"

"Offering her marriage?"

"Yes; my father is a notary; he has property which I shall inherit."

"And he will consent to the marriage?"

"He certainly must!"

"And Impéria replied —"

"Nothing. She appears as if she had not received my letter."

"Which does not prevent you from hoping?"

"I have hoped, but now I fear! What do you advise me?"

"Nothing. Observe her and wait."

"Then you think I need not give her up?"

"I know absolutely nothing about it."

"Let us dine together," he went on. "You will suffer me to talk about her. If I were left alone, I should commit some folly."

I heard him ramble on throughout the evening, for the most part without comprehending a word he said to me. I thought him stupidly presumptuous in aspiring to the favor of Impéria, and I took for my own comfort the petty consolations that I had offered him. Without considering that I was as vain as he, I flattered myself with the persuasion that she had told a falsehood to free herself from the pursuit of Léonce, and that it was not I whom she had intended to discourage.

Seeing Léonce so ridiculous, I nevertheless profited by my rival so far as to resolve that I would act like him in no respect. He took no pains to hide his great despair from any one, and the outcry that he made about it prevented them from connecting it with me. I appeared very gay and very careless, denying that I had made an indirect declaration to Impéria; I pretended that I had merely expressed my general views on the subject of love and devotion. I succeeded in not being too foolish, and in averting, if not suspicion, at least raillery. Léonce seemed to provoke it by his absurdity, and did me the service of monopolizing it.

Impéria had a small success in the new piece. She played well, and gave general satisfaction. Her head was not at all turned by it, however;

and she replied to all our compliments, that she did not shut her eyes to all there yet remained for her to learn, before she could take any position in the theatre. Still, she gained confidence. She mounted a step upon the ladder, and appeared gratified. We knew that Bellamare had written to encourage and congratulate her. Mademoiselle Corinne was overcome by her sweetness and consideration, more especially as she had been severely put down by everybody when she had attempted to slander Impéria.

The new play brought Impéria to the theatre every evening. She already had a part in the next piece, which was soon to be rehearsed. So she passed nearly all her time in working, and I could see her constantly; but, unwilling that my father should fancy that idleness had made me change my profession, and wishing to decide on nothing without his consent, I took care to continue my law-studies, and I retired at nine o'clock at night to study until two in the morning. I rose late, and went at noon to the theatre, where I spent the remainder of the day, with the exception of my dinner hour. Impéria performed the hard task of rehearsing three or four hours during the day, and playing three or four hours in the evening, with a change of costume between each act. The rest of the time she worked at her lace or studied at home. She did not lose a moment, and the calmness that she exhibited in this terrible life was inconceivable. She possessed so much intelligence and information, that no sub-

ject appeared foreign to her, and she talked of everything with modest ease. She never seemed either sad or gay. The discovery of her real age had calmed me somewhat, at first; not that she was less beautiful or less desirable for being older, but how her two years' seniority over me had thrown me back! Certainly, the leader of the orchestra was right, in telling me that I was too young to indulge in any future plans whatever!

Despite this new and very evident obstacle in my path, despite the care I devoted to appearing sensible, I soon felt my desire revive in all its intensity: it was like a madness, a monomania. The senseless pretensions of Léonce gave me strength to conceal my malady, but not to conquer it. I was attracted by Impéria, — unwittingly on her part, like the moth by the candle. I absolutely wished to burn myself. She had the advantage of me in birth and education; in her already assured position and decided future; in her talent, to which, though incomplete as yet, I, perhaps, could never attain; lastly, in her age, which gave her superior judgment, in her experience of misfortune, which gave her greater strength and worth.

What could I offer her? A face that people praised, but which might not please her; a paltry sum that represented a meagre livelihood during the two or three years of my apprenticeship; and an enthusiastic love that she had no reason to think permanent.

She made me comprehend this perfectly, when she was forced to notice my struggles and guess the emotion

of my silence. I exerted still more self-control, for what I specially feared was that she should conceive a distrust of me, and beg me never to address her again. I strove to ward off her suspicions, and in proportion to my former desire that she should know my love were my present endeavors to make her think that she had been in error. I even carried my dissimulation and cowardice so far as to pay a little court to Mademoiselle Corinne, trembling lest she should fancy my compliments serious. She troubled herself very little about them; she dreamed of more substantial conquests. Léonce, rejected by Impéria, displayed his pique by attempting to take up Corinne in earnest. She laughed at him; and as for me, she told me confidentially that she regretted my precarious situation, as she did not intend to make a love-match.

Heaven knows that I had never spoken to her of either love or marriage. I had contented myself with talking of her beauty, which was somewhat problematical; nevertheless, my simple stratagem succeeded. Impéria, who was herself very simple in reality, was at length persuaded that I did not care for her, and then she spoke to me with the same sweetness and confidence that she accorded to the others.

I remained divided between the desire and fear of undeceiving her, when one fine day she forced me to reassure her completely. They had been talking of this very Corinne, who let everybody make love to her without caring for any one, and, as was usual, the general conversation

was interrupted by the summons of the call-boy. At last I found myself alone with Impéria for the first time.

"I think you are a little cruel toward my companion," she said to me; "is it from pique?"

"I assure you that it is not," I replied.

"It is because you are all without mercy for women who do not respond to your flatteries, I see plainly!"

"If I were to reproach Mademoiselle Corinne, it would be for the reason that, without responding to them, she listens to them; but what do our childish spite and bitterness matter to you,—to you who will not even allow us to tell you the truth?"

"How so?"

"If one told you the good he thought of you, you would be angry. So you need not fear that you will be tried by trivial flatteries."

Impéria assumed no affectation, to embarrass me. She went straight to the point.

"If you think well of me," she rejoined, "you may tell me so without offending me. I believe I have declared in your presence that my heart belongs to some one who is absent. I repeat it to you, to set you at your ease, because, if you esteem me, you will not put me to any trial."

I replied that I would give her a proof of my respect by entreating her to regard me as her devoted servant.

"After the declaration you have just made," I added, "and which, besides, I had not forgotten, I think you should see, in the fidelity of the devotion that I offer you, the absence of impertinent curiosity and misplaced presumption."

"What you say is very true and very good," she replied, holding out her hand to me, "and I thank you for it."

"You accept my devotion?"

"And your friendship, since it is absolutely disinterested."

She left the greenroom, smiling at me; as for me, I remained to weep in silence. I had just burned my ships.

One morning, while they were rehearsing the last piece to be played before the annual closing, I found myself alone in the greenroom, with a man of medium height and very well formed, whose face impressed me like one of those memories that we cannot exactly account for. His age might have been from thirty-five to forty years. He had small eyes, dark brown in color, a face large and square without being massive, a large mouth, a short irregular nose, a flat, closely shaved chin, and hair brushed down over the forehead and temples. All this made up a pleasant and attractive sort of ugliness. The least smile raised the corners of his lip and deepened the half-dimples in his cheeks. His black eyeballs had a piercing vivacity, his jaw showed angles of indomitable energy; but the smoothness of his forehead and the delicacy of his nostrils counterbalanced by something pure and exquisite the appetites of a combative and sensual nature. One could not fail to recognize in him, at first sight, a comic actor of a certain rank; and I was wondering if he were not a celebrity, when he addressed me, to ask if I belonged to the theatre. I nearly answered him with a burst of laughter, his voice and nasal accent were

so peculiar; but I restrained myself quickly, for this voice was like a flash of light. So I was, at last, in the presence of the illustrious *impresario*, Bellamere! At the same time, by a very logical connection of ideas, I recalled the associations I had had with his face: I had seen it on a photograph at the bedside of Impéria.

I greeted him respectfully, and in three words I told him my position, expressing a wish to make my *début*, as soon as possible in the province.

He regarded me somewhat as a jockey does a horse, walking round me, examining my feet, knees, teeth, hair, and requesting me to take a few steps before him, but all this with a playful and paternal air that could not wound me.

"The deuse!" he said, after a moment's reflection, "you must be bad indeed not to please half the audience, the half that wears the petticoats. You are twenty, and are studying law? Do you know how to dance?"

"The *bouffées* of Auvergne, — yes! And I know all the spirited dances of the students' balls, besides; but I do not intend —"

"I do not speak of your dancing on the stage, but a knowledge of dancing is necessary; it imparts an ease, if not a distinction, to the gait. However, that does not always make one graceful on the stage. Let us see! hand me that cane chair. O, with one hand, if you please; it is not heavy! Why use the right hand, since it was within reach of the left? You must learn to employ both hands equally. Stay, take the chair so, and do this!"

He took it, placed it in the middle of the room, and seated himself on it. I imagined that it was the easiest thing in the world, and that he was making sport of me; however, when I attempted the same thing, "It is not ungraceful," he said, "but it is very inconvenient. That is the way to do in the rôle of a bashful youth who sits down in a drawing-room for the first time in his life. You have placed the chair so that you would sit down sideways, and make a most ridiculous failure; also you took care to look behind you before seating yourself, which is a signal awkwardness; and then you let yourself drop down abruptly, as if you were angry or worn out with fatigue. The movement of the actor on the stage should not be felt. He must be seated as if he had no body, for the act of sitting is always a very vulgar thing. The very furniture designated for that purpose is laughable, when you think of it! By an ingenious jugglery, the actor must make both the use of the furniture, and the act of employing it, forgotten; in tragedy everything must be noble, above all, this movement, which is the most delicate and most difficult of all; in comedy it must be graceful, even when it is burlesque. That which is neither graceful nor noble is necessarily unbecoming. Stay, look at me. This is how you sat down."

And he copied me so drolly, that I began to laugh. Then he rose and resealed himself several times, changing his position, and revealing to me what none of the actors, whom I had seen rehearse and perform, had given

me the least idea of, — a natural grace, the highest degree of art carried into the most insignificant details, the perfection of expression in the most trifling action.

"Among ten thousand spectators," added he, "there might, perhaps, be three, who would know that you sat down so, intentionally, and that there is a complete science in it, the result of long study; but, of these ten thousand spectators, there would not be one who was not unconsciously influenced by your least act. Without knowing why it is good, all will feel that it is good; and there I give you, in two words, the whole secret of the profession."

"I should be very happy," I replied, "to become a member of your company, and receive your lessons."

"That can be arranged," he replied. "Will you be here in an hour?"

"I will be here any time you wish."

"Good; wait for me."

Probably he went at once to make inquiries about me. When he rejoined me, Impéria was on his arm.

"I engage you," he said; "it is settled. Every one speaks well of you, and Mademoiselle Impéria among the rest. What salary do you expect, my dear boy? You should know that a *débutant* is not remunerated in a way to light his cigar with bank-notes."

I replied that I expected no remuneration, since I might be of no use to him. In receiving from him only his good advice, I should still be his debtor.

"Undoubtedly," said he, "all *débutants* should understand that; but you must have something to live on, to dress yourself decently —"

"I have money and clothes. I can wait two or three months very easily, if my apprenticeship demands that time."

"I see that you are a very worthy lad, and that you know Bellamare to be incapable of abusing your delicacy; you shall not repent it. Come to see me to-morrow. I will give you a short rôle to learn; next day you will come to study it with me, but know it well!"

He gave me his address, and left me with a pressure of the hand.

When I took my first lesson, although he really treated me with as much indulgence as if I had been his son, I was quite terrified by his nice appreciation.

"Listen," he said to me, in recapitulation, at the end of the lesson; "certainly it is a great advantage to be gifted as you are; and if you were a fool, you might easily persuade yourself that you had nothing to learn. You are an intelligent lad, and you will comprehend that the beauty of your person and the perfection of your voice are sources of failure as well as of success. When you appear upon the stage, well dressed and gotten up, prepare for a murmur of approval; but, directly after, the audience will be severe and distrustful. At the first words that you speak, however, there will be another favorable murmur; your voice is admirable. And then? You will speak well, I answer for that. A new danger! Hence the audience, alert and attentive, will be fearfully exacting. That is the case with the men of our day, — with Frenchmen above all. We have passed the period

when, under the happy sky of Southern civilizations, beauty was considered almost equal to a virtue. Antiquity has transmitted to us the names of artists who had no other merit than that of being beautiful. To-day, no one cherishes the memory of an actor without talent, had he the physique of Antinous or Meleager. At present, they demand *everything*, *everything*; nothing less than that. But what is least required, perhaps, is classic beauty. It has a prestige only at the first moment. It is tiresome, provoking, irritating, if art can lend it no attraction, which is quite another thing, and which sometimes succeeds in rendering ugliness agreeable and sympathetic. Modern ideas are all for realism, and, to a certain extent, that is an advance; for man is not made merely to serve as a model for a sculptor, and it is not a moral advantage for him to be distinguished above other men by his physical perfection: if he is vain of it, they ridicule him; if he does not turn it to account, they think him unintelligent. One must know how to be handsome, which is much more difficult than to know how to be plain; and in our art, which consists in producing all effects personally and directly, the chief point is to know exactly what one is, in order to know what one must be.

"Ah well! I am going to tell you, as an actor, a painter, and an anatomist, — for I am something of each, — what you are, when repeating your part; a smoking-room Apollo, neither more nor less. Your eyes sparkling, but too bold; your smile very frank, but too unsteady, from

nerves impregnated with alcohol; your body very supple and very strong, but addicted to fantastic attitudes, which lack meaning and originality; your voice clear and sonorous, but seeking by preference the less musical and less natural intonations, and full of false inflections. You would be a detestable comedian. You would always overdo it. You have, I should say, a restless, anxious spirit. You would arrive at *bonhomie* with difficulty, and you would not know how to say in a natural manner, 'Well, how are you?' You might have played the romantic drama; that exists no longer; and public taste inclines more and more to the simple style. If you could have rôles made for you, where, in spite of the black coat, your character would have energetic manners, and a certain eccentricity of mind, you would be good; but one finds, perhaps once or twice in his life, the rôle which is exactly suited to the type that he can represent perfectly. Before becoming famous, he has to submit to all sorts of characters, insignificant or uncongenial to his nature. The great thing in commencing, is to adapt himself, to efface his personality, if necessary; to make himself ready, in a word, to do everything suitably without hoping to be admired and applauded in his own proper person. When you have, to some degree, got rid of yourself, of him who was a handsome student, but not even a tolerable actor, you will begin to study, to invent, to create. Three years of study, at the least, my boy, may make you a charming young *premier*.

It is a good situation; it demands, in addition to all that you have, all that you have not. It is paid very well, because the handsome, intelligent type is rarest. If you do not grow stout, your bust is worth its weight in gold. Even now your legs are equivalent to a pretty sum of money, and under any circumstances your voice is a capital; unfortunately, all this is nothing and worse than nothing, I tell you again, if you take a wrong course. You will not be insignificant, you will be impassioned, but your energy may be ridiculous and your anger that of a bully. Beware of that. If you are tractable, I will save you from that danger; but, if you have not a great amount of sensibility and truth, you will become cold and commonplace. In conclusion, my conscience commands me to tell you this; you have to work prodigiously at the most difficult and thankless of trades. The result may be a life of glory and fortune; again, it may be nothing of the sort: and I will not guarantee at all that in three years you will not be a dead failure. The profession, which is indispensable, in nine cases out of twenty overpowers originality. Reflect, then, before quitting your present position and your future career for the stage. You will tell me to-morrow if you feel the courage to transform radically your individuality, at the risk of becoming a being absolutely annihilated, hopeless, empty!

"And again, consider this: that one may change his profession so long as he walks in the beaten track of society; but the man, once entered

into the Bohemia of the theatre, can never return to any other. It is not because prejudice thrusts you back. That matters little. An energetic man triumphs over it, and obtains everywhere the place that he knows how to take; but after the theatre, he no longer possesses an available energy. The theatre uses him up, consumes him, devours him. One lives as long there as elsewhere, on condition of not leaving it, and of keeping up this factitious strength, nervous over-excitement, and intoxication that are found nowhere else; once return to a quiet life, even when you have felt an imperious need of it, and *ennui* assails you, the mind fills with phantoms, the train of actual life disheartens you, real feelings are confounded with the fictions of the past, the days seem ages, and in the evening, at the hour when you were wont to see the foot-lights rise to illuminate your face, and the public hastening in to be entertained with your performance, you fancy you are nailed alive into your coffin.

"No, no, my child, do not enter the theatre unless you are drawn thither by an irresistible call; for it is a lottery, where the winners, after having risked everything, are forced to stake their life and soul.

"I ought to tell you this. Do not imagine that it is the result of the trial we have just been making. If I consulted only my own interest, I should conceal my thoughts from you; for such as you are, in a very short time you will be of great use to me. They are not fastidions in the provinces, they are not spoiled

there; and for a success of *appearance* you have every requisite. To an actor already launched, I should make no suggestion; but you interest me, you please me, and you are rushing headlong into the unknown. I owe the truth to you."

I thanked him warmly, and promised to consider; but I did not consider; I only thought of Impéria, from whom I could not see myself eternally separated. I summoned all the strength of my will for a desperate enterprise, and one month later I departed for the province, with Impéria, Bellamare, and the troupe which he had recruited.

"So I was an actor, monsieur, an actor for three years; and as I always bore myself like an honorable man in the profession, I left it without reproach. But I have, none the less, forfeited the future I could have aspired to, and I have nearly made my father die of grief, as I will tell you another time, for I have been talking so long that you must be tired of hearing me."

"Not in the least; if you are not fatigued, continue. I wish to know the result of your love for the charming Impéria."

"And I intend to tell you, but not just now, if you will permit me. To take breath, I will sketch the profile of the cascade."

"Very well. One word more, however: what is the *fearful misconduct*, then, of which certain good souls in the vicinity accuse you?"

"You ask. I have been an actor; and, according to them, that is all that is needed to insure damnation."

II.

When Lawrence had sketched a little, and reflected a little, as if to arrange his reminiscences in due order, he resumed his recital:—

I should not see my father before vacation, and I had three months of freedom until then. I wrote him that I was going to travel with a friend for my instruction. This short explanation was sufficient for the worthy man. Unused to any sort of study, ignorant of any social mechanism outside his own sphere, he could easily believe that I was going to study during my travels, since I assured him of my resolution to devote myself untiringly to my future profession.

Before taking you with me in my nomadic life, I must introduce to you the principal personages with whom I united my destiny. Some left Paris with us, others joined us on the way.

Bellamare's inseparable companion and perhaps his best friend, although his antipodes in character and appearance, was a man whose singular history deserves to be related. He was called Moranbois; and, though the least mirthful man in the world, his real name was *Hilarion*. He had never known his family. A hospital foundling, he had taken care of the pigs at the house of a peasant who beat him and left him to die of hunger. Carried off, half willing, half reluctant, by passing mountebanks, he had proved, however, little qualified to divert the public; they soon abandoned him on a road where

a man from Auvergne had picked him up to carry his pack. This trade pleased him; he had food enough, he loved to travel, and his new master was not a bad man. He found that Hilarion was a brave lad, very patient, resigned, and faithful. The pedlar had but one fault; he was a perfect sot, and very often, bending under the weight of his wares, he scattered them upon the road. Hilarion, with a little exercise, became a packhorse capable of bearing the commercial stores of his employer. Besides, as he had a kind heart, he did not leave him in the bottom of the ditches, where he took frequent naps in the course of his journey. When he saw him reel and stagger, he prudently led him away into some open field, remote from quarrels and secure from thieves. He watched over both master and load. He united the duties of the horse and the dog.

The pedler became attached to Hilarion, and shared his profits with him. Thus the child might have earned and laid by something; but when his master was thirsty, he borrowed the lad's portion, and forgot to return it. It is true that Hilarion forgot to claim it.

This friendship and partnership lasted a long time. Hilarion was twenty when his master died of dropsy in a hospital, leaving a little money, which his young associate carried to the heirs, without deducting anything to pay him for his services. They were poor peasants burdened with a family, from whom he had not the heart to demand anything. He left them without consid-

ering his future. By dint of seeing others careless of their lot, he had grown accustomed to do likewise. Already misanthropic, he had seen and known nothing good in his life, unless, perhaps, his drunken master, who had not maltreated him, but who also had not remunerated him. However, he brought no reproach against his memory. This man had taught him to read and write passably, also how to use a cudgel in self-defence. He had developed his physical strength, his coolness in danger, his inclination for a wandering life. Going steadily on alone, Hilarion believed that a courageous, strong, and sober man could not die of hunger, even in the midst of a selfish world.

He was in error; it needs a capital to start with, be it ever so small. No work can dispense with the necessary tools. Hilarion had not the wherewithal to purchase the most trifling stock. He did not know how to utilize his empty hands, until, after two days of fasting, passing over a public place, he saw a wrestler, who threw all the soldiers of the garrison, and he bethought himself that his fists might render him good service. This athlete seemed to him more skilful than robust, and he presented himself as a competitor, after having carefully observed his performance. Only, while wagering that he could conquer him, he confessed to the audience that he was dying of hunger and thirst.

"Eat and drink," said the cross-roads Alcides, loftily; "I do not throw those who would fall of themselves."

An improvised collection permitted the new-comer to devour a bit of bread, and to swallow a glass of wine, after which he descended into the arena.

It was truly an arena, the Roman amphitheatre of Nîmes; and when Hilarion Moranbois related his story, he said that, seeing for the first time this vast monument, so fine in its proportions, without knowing what it was, without the slightest idea of the past, he felt as strong and valiant as ten thousand men.

The professional Hercules was worsted by the improvised Hercules. The next day he demanded his revenge. Hilarion had dined well; the amateurs of the vicinity had celebrated his victory at the tavern. He gained a new conquest, so brilliant that other strolling wrestlers were summoned to compete with him. He threw them all, and was engaged, with the understanding that he should receive one fourth of the profits. He left this troupe, however, because it was proposed that he should let himself be thrown by a man in a mask, who was no other than the wrestler whose place he had taken. They made him very advantageous offers, if he would take part in this comedy, which always proved a great success with the public, and brought them a good deal of money. His self-love got the better of his interest; he refused with scorn, flew into a passion, knocked down his employer, broke the big drum with a blow of his fist, for which they made him pay a hundred-fold its value, and made his escape, his hands still empty, to repair to Arles,

where he had been told he would find other arenas. He had decidedly a *tasté* for classic monuments.

On the way he encountered Mademoiselle Plume-au-Vent, who danced a species of tarantella, accompanying herself with the Spanish tambourine and the triangle, with much skill; this was his first love. They made their *début* together in several towns upon the route, one of which proved nearly fatal to him.

When he had finished exhibiting his talents in the public place, the evening of his arrival, he was cautiously addressed by a servant-maid, who conducted him through a labyrinth of obscure streets, to a house of good appearance, buried in a wilderness of gardens. Here, a slender, dark lady, with a quick, flashing eye, addressed him in these words: "Will you enter my employment as undergardener? You will do nothing. You will sleep during the day. At night you will quietly mount guard in the garden. I am tormented by a garrison officer who is madly in love with me, and threatens to carry me off. He is a desperado, a devil, who will do as he says, and who is very strong; I give you warning. My people are cowards, bribed by him, perhaps, and you see that alone, in this isolated dwelling, I could receive no assistance from without. If you see this man prowling under my windows, or even in my grounds, knock him down. Do not kill him, but treat him so that he will never wish to come again. Every time that you give him a lesson of this kind you will receive a hundred francs."

"But if he is stronger than I?" replied Hilarion; "if he kills me?"

"Nothing, venture, nothing have," replied the lady.

"That is fair enough," thought the wrestler.

And he accepted.

Eight nights passed away without a leaf's rustling or a grain of sand stirring in the garden. On the ninth night, by the clear light of the moon, an officer, whose appearance corresponded to the description given Hilarion, opened a gate, to which he had a key, and approached the house. Hilarion was unwilling to attack him without warning. He had the simplicity to tell him that he was about to do him an injury, if he did not withdraw immediately. The stranger laughed in his face, called him a fool, and threatened to roll him in the melon-patch, if he tried to hinder him. Hilarion could not suffer this language, and the contest began. The visitor's impertinence had angered him, and the vigorous defence he made did not permit him to handle him gently. Hilarion rolled him in the artichokes, and left him there, so badly worsted that he believed him dead. He ran to inform the lady, who came out with a torch and her chambermaid, to ascertain the result.

"Wretch!" cried she, "what have you done? You have assassinated my husband, who had just returned from a journey! Make your escape, and let me never hear of you again!"

Hilarion was stupefied.

"Claim your hundred francs," whispered the maid, suddenly; "she knew very well that it was monsieur,

and she owes you a grudge for not having killed him outright."

Hilarion was so terrified at having committed a crime while thinking to perform good service as guardian, that he would claim nothing, and ran away, swearing they should never catch him there again.

At Arles he rejoined Mademoiselle Plume-au-Vent, who had already entered into partnership with an Alsatian giant and a (so-called) Lapland dwarf. He met with tolerable success; but the time of the conscription was at hand, and he drew the Number One. He served as soldier in Algiers for seven years, and gained some advantage from it. He finished his education there, that is, he learned French and Arabic, and as he wrote a very fair hand and reckoned very accurately, as he was a model soldier, brave and punctual, his comrades, who loved him in spite of his roughness, thought that he would be promoted. He was not, however, and, notwithstanding his good deportment and assiduity in the service, he was struck off the rolls for insubordination. It is true that he detested his superiors, whoever they were, and that he replied to them disrespectfully. Obedient to the military rule, he could not endure a personal command, when it seemed to overstep the limits of strict authority, or not to observe them scrupulously. A spirit of criticism, very singular in a man of his low rank, very unfortunate in his present position, had developed itself in him, and bade fair to become the foundation of his character, the obstacle of his future. He received

more punishments than rewards; and when he had served his time, hoping nothing from a re-enlistment, he returned to France, as solitary, as destitute, as he had left it.

In the regiment he had had much practice in all kinds of gymnastics, and in all he had been the first. Still, he did not like the profession of gymnast, and the prospect of recommencing his exercises in full blast did not please him. For some years he was porter on the port at Toulon; *homme de peine*, as it is called, — a dolorous expression which sufficiently describes a hard and gloomy life. Physical strength is a more perilous gift than one would think. Men seek to turn everything to their advantage, and the exceptional strength of Hilarion exposed him to all sorts of experiments. He was sounded by the thieves, and nearly involved unwittingly in attempts at murder. Enlightened in time, he held malefactors in execration, and believed he saw them everywhere; his misanthropy increased; and as in the midst of fatigue and sadness he reflected more than suited his wretched condition, he became a sort of Diogenes. Alone in life, he made himself still more alone by his habits and his thoughts.

Very disinterested, very careless of the morrow and indifferent for himself, he turned nothing to account, not even his own brave acts. He distinguished himself in several rescues, and received several medals, but without thinking of asking any reward, without caring to join any association, without consenting to accept the slightest thanks. He was accustomed to say that, not loving

the human race, he exposed his life only for the pleasure of using his muscles and exercising his judgment. Several persons from the South, who afterwards met him again in civilized life, recalled the strange and proud individual whom they had seen a porter at Toulon, and had even employed for the peculiarity of his character. Silent, absorbed, haughty, his glance was always stern and suspicious, his speech harsh, often abusive, and always cynical, his gesture angry, and all at once a scornful calm would succeed his threatening manner. Everything was to him a source of irritation, and almost immediately after an object of scorn or of indifference.

One fine day he found an infant entirely abandoned, who attached itself to him. It was a pretty little boy, who, although very cowardly, was not frightened by the bearded face of Hilarion. Touched by this proof of confidence, or struck with its singularity, he carried the child to his den, tended and reared him after his fashion, but without succeeding the least in modifying his instincts of idleness, cowardice, and vanity. This vain and feeble creature, who was no other than the young *premier Léonce*, of whom I told you in the first part of my story, became Hilarion's tyrant. The sternest man needs apparently to be governed by some secret sympathy; to gratify Léonce, to procure him playthings and new clothes, to protect him from the ridicule and ill-treatment of other children, in a word, to watch over him and have him always near him, Hilarion left the port and bales of Tou-

lon, and resumed his old profession of wrestler, his life of adventure, his spangled waistband, his tinsel diadem, and his ancient sobriquet of *Coq-en-Bois*.

It was in this capacity that he happened to perform one day, some ten years ago, in the presence of Bellamare, whom chance had brought to the fair at Beaucaire. The sinister face, harsh voice, and odd pronunciation of this personage certainly did not attract the *imprésario*, and he could only admire the strength of his biceps; but next day, as Bellamare was returning in a hired cab, he encountered on the road this Hercules coming from the quarter where he lived, with Léonce on his shoulders, — Léonce, ten or twelve years old, but too grand a prince to travel otherwise than on the backs of others. Hilarion Coq-en-Bois remembered having carried the pack at the age when his *protégé* made others carry him, and not feeling sensible of sufficient charm of mind or attraction of character to amuse his pupil, he did what he could for him, what he knew how to do, — he spared him all physical fatigue, and fatigued himself instead. Was he not born *homme de peine*?

While absorbed in these philosophical reflections, upon the hill before him Coq-en-Bois perceived a carriage which grazed the edge of the precipice in an alarming manner. He judged that the driver of this vehicle was asleep, and he quickened his pace; but before he had time to reach it the horse took fright at a goat, swerved to the right, and then to the left. It was all over with

Bellamare, for the driver of the carriage, while asleep, had dropped the reins. Fortunately Coq-en-Bois had hurriedly laid down his burden, had hastened up, had seized one wheel in his mighty grasp. The horse, which had already lost footing, rolled into the abyss alone, the two shafts being fortunately broken clean off with the lines. The cab, stopped by Coq-en-Bois, recoiled, and Bellamare, leaping out, saw that his rescuer had one hand mangled by the unprecedented effort that he had just made, at the risk of being involved in the general ruin.

Thus commenced their friendship. They travelled together as far as Lyons, and the wrestler, being pressed with questions, related his story. The proud modesty with which he mentioned the heroic actions of his life, that something grand or trivial which in every word revealed his noble and sullen character, impressed the artist vividly.

Bellamare's dream was to discover different types and bring them to perfection; he fancied, not without reason, that a man so inured to fatigue, so resigned to all contingencies, so firm and so proud, so distrustful and so incorruptible, would be an invaluable factotum for him and his company. Coq-en-Bois, or we will now say *Moranbois*, — for the first thing Bellamare did was to find him a suitable name, whose euphony would not be too strange in his ears, — Moranbois had but one really insupportable defect, the coarseness of his language. He promised to correct it, and could never keep his word; but he displayed in Bellamare's service so many es-

sential qualities, such as honesty, devotion, courage, practical intelligence, that the *impresario* could never consent to part with him. He even carried his friendship so far as to undertake to make an actor of Léonce. He could only make him a pretty, empty-headed boy, thinly veneered with the wit of others, and a somewhat more than average performer; but he procured engagements for him in the province, and even at Paris, where he still vegetates in insignificant rôles. I need not tell you that this self-infatuated personage believes himself the victim of injustice, that he accuses all the managers of having sacrificed him through jealousy of his success with women; finally, that he has completely forgotten the fatherly devotion of Moranbois, that he does not care a rush for him, and would see him reduced to utter destitution, without remembering that he owed him everything. This race of ingrates are rendered striking in dramatic life by their folly; but does not one encounter it elsewhere? It is my opinion that it abounds everywhere.

Moranbois, Bellamare's right-hand man, soon found that he had not enough to do in travelling as courier to engage the theatres, to prepare the lodgings, to make arrangements with the hotel-keepers, lamp-makers, hair-dressers, and machinists, to order the posters, organize the means of conveyance, etc. He wished to utilize himself by reason of his strength, and one fine day Bellamare's company were convulsed with laughter at the declaration of the ex-pedler, ex-porter, ex-wrestler, that he had

health enough to act plays into the bargain. Offended by the mirth of his audience, he called all the actors mouthpieces, harlequins, and buffoons (I soften the epithets singularly).

They were used to his peculiarities, and laughed the more. He grew seriously angry, and affirmed that he could play the brigands of melodrama better than any one.

"Why not?" said Bellamare. "Learn a rôle. Let us rehearse it by ourselves, and we will see."

Moranbois made the attempt, and gave the rough voice of his part in the most satisfactory manner; but he lacked imagination. Bellamare furnished him with ideas, and taught him to turn his natural defects to account. Tractable with this ingenious and persuasive master, Moranbois became a very tolerable brigand for the province. He did no injury to the play, and pleased the populace greatly. His success did not intoxicate him, however; he consented to fill the most inferior rôles in the plays where he was only a "utility." He never thought it beneath him to speak but three lines, to represent a thief, a peasant, a drunkard, a workman, in a short scene, or even to put on livery and carry a letter. This humility was all the more touching from his secret conviction of being a great actor, — an erroneous but naïve belief which did not increase his pride; for which Bellamare felt grateful to him.

But I have not yet told you the oddest result of this association between a person of exquisite tact and culture, like Bellamare, and the rugged, ill-dressed being, always im-

possible in his manner and language, whose portrait I am sketching for you. Bellamare, who sees and observes everything, without appearing to notice anything, discovered that M. Hilarion Moranbois was a very keen and accurate critic. When visiting the Paris theatre in his company, he was struck with his judgment on the plays, and his just appreciation of the actors. He took him to the museum, to see if he had discernment outside the theatre; Moranbois stopped instinctively before the paintings of the masters, and was enthusiastic over the Greek statues and the Roman busts. He could not state what constituted the ideal and what the realistic, but he expressed the difference in his own way, and Bellamare perceived that he had understood it thoroughly.

He consulted him in regard to the spirit and sense of monuments, and the art of scenic decoration, and found him full of suggestions and invention. It was settled; the specialty of Moranbois was revealed. He was pre-eminently the man of good advice and prompt appreciation. When he witnessed a rehearsal at Paris, — where he accompanied his manager everywhere, — in ten words, mostly coarse and brutal, he told Bellamare what parts of the play would fail, and which would be successful, and what would be its final fate. He never made a mistake. He was, in himself, the susceptible, vibrating public, simple and uncorrupted; generous toward the slightest effort, cruel toward the least falling off; always ready to laugh or to cry, but remorseless

when they bored him. He was instinct personified. His mind, still undeveloped in mature age, was like a thermometer of the crowd. What authors of high literary rank would have thought of consulting this man, with a long aquiline nose, elevated head, sprinkled with thin locks, a brown sunken cheek, small hollow eyes, keen and gloomy; this sombre personage in rough coat, waistcoat of Scotch plaid, and tumbled cravat, with hands innocent of gloves, who kept in a corner with the machinists, and who might have been taken for the least attentive of them? And had you said to this literary *élite*, "The poor devil that you see yonder, who hears and judges you, is a former mountebank, who balanced a carriage-wheel upon his chin, and juggled with cannon-balls, by no means hollow; ah well, ask him his opinion and follow it; he is the embodied public, by whom you will be hissed or borne in triumph!"—what surprise these masters of the art would testify, what scorn perhaps!

Bellamare consulted Moranbois like an oracle, and the oracle was infallible. I have related to you this long history, I have told you all these details, and allowed myself this digression, to give you an idea of that intellectual Bohemia of the stage which is recruited from all classes, consequently from both extremes of the social scale. The most different destinies, the most dissimilar educations, the most opposite faculties, seem carried thither, like the various ruins that the tide drifts and heaps up at random upon a rock. From these fragments of a

world of dead passion, disappointed ambition, spontaneous growths, ardent dreams, gloomy despairs, mental maladies, marvellous unfoldings, mad, sublime, or stupid inspirations, is reared the fairy palace called dramatic art, the sanctuary of splendid or miserable fiction, open to all the winds of heaven. It is something fleeting as a dream, confused as a chaos, where all that is false is linked to the representation of the true; where the purple of the sunset and the azure of the night are the result of electricity; where the trees are painted canvas, the mist a screen of gauze, the rocks and colonnades of distemper; you are aware of this, you know all the artifices, you see through all the tricks, but what you do not know is the phantasmagoria of moral life which lives there with a life as artificial as the rest. This bent old man with a cracked voice and dull eye, who makes a thousand spectators say every evening, "Where have they fished up that old fellow who plays an octogenarian to the life, and who still preserves his memory?" is a young man of twenty-five, who has all his teeth and all his hair, who is fresh and healthy, and whom his mistress expects when he shall have wiped off his wrinkles, and placed his false bald head upon a wooden block. He straightens himself and sings with a manly voice, going down stairs four steps at a time. His rôle of old man is easy for him, and does not diminish his gayety. In contrast with him you admired that handsome conquering hero, whose fiery eye and fresh voice

express passion and triumphant gallantry. Alas! he has been young these forty years, and his love-making costs him very dear. This excellent comedian, who makes you nearly die of laughter, is a wretch who thinks of suicide, or seeks forgetfulness in intoxication. This third-rate valet, whose classical employment consists in receiving kicks in the back, is a scholar who makes archaeological researches of great importance, or an antiquarian who collects rare works. That other, who represents the tyrants or the traitors, is a father of a family who takes his children into the country whenever he has a day of leisure. There is another who paints charmingly, and who acts the grocers' parts; another, who represents persons of high rank, dukes and princes, has a passion for chess or for angling; others are sportsmen, carsmen, pianists, engineers, what not. And the ladies? This one is a courtesan, and plays the part of *ingénue* to perfection. That is a respectable matron, and personates courtesans admirably. This one has a wonderful elegance and purity of diction; she can scarcely read her parts, and understands not the first word of them. That one speaks badly, and seems to lack intelligence; she is very thoroughly educated, and fit to keep a boarding-school. Here is an austere duenna; she is a speaker of *doubles-entendres*. There is a plump, bold peasant-girl, a sprightly waiting-maid; hush, these are perfect devotees, perhaps mystic doves of Father Three-Stars, who makes a specialty of theatrical conversions.

So everything in this pretended life belonging to the stage is contrast, empty seeming, and authorized deception. Sometimes, again, the actor so identifies himself with his character, that he never throws it off. Such a one, who cared only for pipe and billiards, becomes a profound politician, because he has acted grave, historical parts. Such another, who believed himself a radical republican, becomes conservative, because he plays financial rôles. Thus, contrasts are sometimes effaced; fiction and reality become confounded in a man to such a point that he who deserves a Monthyon prize would renounce his profession sooner than consent to perform a bad action on the stage; sometimes contrast reaches the last limit, where the most unselfish of men can excel in personating Shylock.

I had a brother actor who had been a Trappist for some years, and related strange and romantic incidents to me about the inner life of convents. It appears that monastic life is also a rock where the most incongruous fragments of human society are stranded, and that the caprices of destiny are there personified, very much as in the theatre: but there, everything dies out and ceases to exist; the stupefying influence of uniformity puts an end to all eccentricity. In dramatic life nothing is confounded, but all stands out in broad relief; individuality grows more and more distinct. There are rôles for each, and even I, who tell you this, have been peasant, student, actor, peasant again, peasant forever, perhaps, but peasant henceforth.

against my will. In what social series could I be reckoned? Every one who passes through convent or theatre is, with few exceptions, forever unclassified.

Let us return to the troupe of Bel-lamare. He had at that time a *grand premier rôle* who cost him a great deal, and caused him no small trouble. He endured him, in the hope that I could replace him at the end of the quarter. This person, who was still handsome, though no longer young, did not lack talent; unfortunately, his mania was to object to it in any one but himself. He rehearsed like an amateur, without ever attending to his own *effects*, so intent was he on watching those of others, in order to suppress or paralyze them. In the province, they often abbreviate the text of the plays that they perform, according to the ability of their performers, or the susceptibility of the local public; they cut out words that would be misunderstood or ill received, situations that would require impossible scenery, entire rôles that are lacking in the company. These erasures, ingenious or absurd, according to the skill of the director, very frequently pass unperceived. Lambeq, our leading actor, had only one idea in his head,—to efface all the parts except his own. In a scene for three, he wished to appropriate the cue of the second interlocutor; in a dialogue, he wished to monopolize both question and answer. I shall always remember the ninth scene of the third act of the "Marriage of Figaro," where the grace and prettiness of Suzanne offended him. In this scene, cut up into terse and lively

dialogue, he declared at rehearsal that Mademoiselle Anna did not answer soon enough, and his own part dragged on that account. So he proposed very seriously to modify it thus. Hear first how the dialogue begins:—

SUZANNE, *breathless*.

My lord!—pardon, my lord!

COUNT ALMAVIVA.

What is it, mademoiselle?

SUZANNE.

You are angry!

THE COUNT.

You wish something, apparently!

SUZANNE.

My mistress has the hysteric. I came to ask you to lend us your smelling-bottle. I will bring it back directly.

THE COUNT.

No, no, keep it for yourself. It may perhaps be useful to you, etc.

Lambeq determined not to allow Suzanne to say a word. Scarcely had she left the greenroom, when he forestalled her by crying out:—

"What is it, mademoiselle? You see me angry! Your mistress has hysteric! She wishes me to lend her my smelling-bottle! Ah well, here it is, but do not bring it back; keep it for yourself! It may be useful to you."

The entire scene, four pages in length, was thus continued in monologue.

"Why not?" said Lambeq; "Almaviva is a *roué*; then he is not a fool. He knows very well that Suzanne seeks him on some futile pretext. This pretext is the *nerves* of

madam. Since he always has a smelling-bottle about him, he understands further that she has come to borrow it. In the course of the scene he has a surprise, however. It is at the moment when Suzanne encourages him; but is there any need of Suzanne's speaking? Cannot her admirer sufficiently interpret and translate her eyes, her smile, her simulated confusion. See how well it goes!"

And he recited the remainder of the dialogue as follows:—

"If you would consent to hear me! . . . Is it not your duty to hear MY Excellency! . . . Why, then, cruel girl, have you not said it sooner? But it is never too late to tell the truth. You will repair to the garden at twilight; do you not walk there every evening? You treated me so harshly this morning! . . . It is true that the page was behind the arm-chair! You are right, I forgot it! . . . However, listen, sweetheart, no rendezvous, no dowry, no marriage! You told me, NO MARRIAGE, NO MASTER'S RIGHTS. Where does she catch up what she says? On my honor, I shall dote upon her! . . . But your mistress awaits this bottle; delicious creature, I will embrace you . . . Such is the world!—She is mine!"

Thus coolly did Lambesq adapt Beaumarchais and other writers, ancient or modern, when he fell in with a troupe where he was allowed free play. Bellamare would not suffer it, and he regarded Bellamare as a stupid, obstinate routinist. He lost his temper, sulked, spoiled the rehearsals, and during the performance no one knew what folly he would improvise

to display himself, and sound the stubborn spectator by a persistent *underlining* of words, glances, and gestures, which was not always approved of, but which forced all his disconcerted comrades to yield him the monopoly of the effect.

Another leading actor, who personated at will the lovers, logicians, and traitors, was Léon, whose sole resemblance to Léonce was in his name. Léon was handsome, good, brave, and generous. He loved the art, and understood it, but he did not love the profession, and he was habitually melancholy. He believed himself created for some loftier expression of his intellect than reciting rôles. He wrote plays that we sometimes acted, and which were not without merit; but a timidity that was, so to speak, bilious, a self-distrust that bordered on inertia, prevented him from publishing them. He belonged to a good family and was well educated. A difference with his parents had thrown him on the stage. He was much loved, very useful, and greatly esteemed; however, he was never happy, and lived wrapped up in himself. I exerted myself to gain his friendship, and obtained it: I know not whether I have preserved it.

Madame Régine, who, from time to time, had taken second and third rate parts at the Odéon, was a member of our company, and played the leading parts in the province. She acted Phèdre, Athalie, Clytemnestra. She was neither young nor handsome, spoke a little too thickly, and lacked dignity, but she had spirit and confidence, and gained the applause of the audience by main force. She was a

very good-natured person, of sufficiently average morality, generous heart, great appetite, inexhaustible gayety, and iron constitution. She was very devoted to Bellamare, and on very good terms with us, rendering herself useful or agreeable to all, but inclined to take advantage of everybody, now and then.

Isabelle Champlain, styled Lucinde, personated fashionable coquettes. She was very handsome, with the exception of too long a nose. This nose could never secure an engagement at Paris: a physical defect condemns much real talent to perpetual banishment in the province. Lucinde was not an ordinary person. She understood her rôles, she had a fine voice, she spoke well, and dressed with elegance and taste. Supported by a rich wine-grower, who, being married in Burgundy, could not maintain her near him, she was very faithful to him, partly from prudence, partly from love of her art and of her person. She was anxious to preserve her full voice, her fine form, and wonderful memory. Honest and avaricious, selfish and cold, she neither benefited nor injured others. Her service at the theatre was most assiduous. There was never any cause to reproach her; but she was very eager in the arrangement of terms, and demanded a large salary. We had a pretty soubrette, arch, lively, and quick as a rocket on the stage. In real life, Anna Leroy was a sentimental blonde, who read romances, and was always struggling with some unhappy passion. Now she loved Lambesq, now Léon, now me. She was so sincere and sweet, that I

never feigned to be in love with her. I respected her: Léon scorned her, because Lambesq had compromised and humiliated her. She lived in tears, awaiting a new love, which always recommenced the series of her deceptions and her lamentations.

So the masculine rôles were sustained by Bellamare, Moranbois, Lambesq, Léon, and myself; the feminine parts by Régine, Impéria, Lucinde, and Anna. A dressing-maid, who served them all, whom they called *La Picarde*, played the silent parts, or those of only three or four words. The man who performed the same offices for us, and who, outside the theatre, had been for a long time attached to Bellamare in the capacity of body-servant, must not be passed over in silence. He bore the strange nickname of Purpurin, and styled himself Purpurino Purpurini, a Venetian nobleman. This jest, of whose origin I am ignorant,—he did not know it himself,—had become reality in his mind. Never having known of any relative, except a great-uncle, who had been, he said, *under assistant hay-bearer* in the stables of Louis XVI., he was persuaded, by some association of ideas difficult to understand, that he might be of Venetian origin and patrician descent. Bellamare related Purpurin's strange notions pleasantly, without seeking to explain them. This person, he said, amused him by putting him out of patience, and he had the privilege of always astonishing him by some folly impossible to foresee, or by some fancy impossible to account for. In fact, he was a thorough blockhead, three fourths

idiot, full of esteem for himself and scorn for those beneath him. His only virtue was his love for Bellamare, and he would have shared, if necessary, his worst misfortunes with a superstitious confidence in his destiny.

"M. Bellamare," he would say, "must needs be what he is, that is, a man of courage and genius, for me to have attached myself to the person of an actor, — I who have served in grand houses in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and to a republican, — I who am legitimist from father to son."

If he had been met with the objection, that, being of Venetian origin, he should be republican on principle, he would have been greatly astonished, and replied by some argument taken from the history of China, or the Apocalypse; for he was never silenced, and his replies were so utterly inconsequent, that whoever argued with him was himself nonplussed.

"He always shuts my mouth by the wandering of his wits," declared Bellamare. "One day when I asked him why he brought me blue stockings to play Figaro, he replied that 'M. Lambesq looked very well with long hair.' Another time, when I was complaining of the headache, he pretended that it was the fault of the barber, who had shaved him badly. And that is always the way, like a game of cross-purposes."

Purpurin made himself useful on the stage, however; he played the simpletons, and played them with such an utter misconstruction, making use of his natural well-qualified

manner to represent the simplicity of his character, that he unconsciously succeeded in being very comic. It was always the same face, that of a fool, namely, his own, that he displayed to the public, and the public did not suspect the innocence of the proceeding. They fancied that Purpurin created this burlesque type, and they thought it very amusing.

You imagine, perhaps, that a success acquired so cheaply satisfied the self-love of Purpurin? Far from it. He was unintentionally ludicrous, and despised his rôle profoundly. He had a passion for blank verse, and dreamed only of tragedy and tragic parts. He tormented Bellamare and Moranbois to let him rehearse *Théramène*, and I must say that this rôle thus rendered would have created a sensation, for it was impossible to conceive of anything more astonishing and more side-splitting.

Bellamare's company was very eccentric. It played a little of everything, — the drama, modern comedy, vaudeville, classic tragedy, and comedy. The repertory was considerable, and was renewed throughout with incredible facility. Familiar with the province and the tastes of different places, Bellamare adapted wonderfully to this varied public the choice of the works with which it furnished him. Certain towns like only the pathetic or the terrible; others, again, care only for the burlesque; others prefer new plays, the latest productions, coming from *the capital*; others still are classical, and wish for alexandrines.

The first qualities which Bella-

were required in his actors were quickness in learning their parts, and docility for the *mise en scène*. He knew that it was impossible to bring out in the province a troupe composed of first-class actors, but he also knew that what is chiefly wanting in the representations of strolling artists is the general effect; and he applied all his strength of will to obtain this: by which means, with average performers, he succeeded in producing plays well learned and well acted.

We opened our performances at Orleans, and there I made my *début*, before a scanty and dispiriting audience. I was not much frightened, however; Impéria was absent. She had left Paris first, to visit her unhappy father, I suppose; and she would not rejoin us until the third day.

It was a great relief for me not to make my first venture in the presence of a judge whom I dreaded more than all the world beside. Moreover, I came out in a rôle of small importance, one of M. Scribe's insignificant lovers. It only needs some address, and, thanks to Bellamare, my personal appearance was all it should be. But I felt that I was very cold, and, in the second act, I became completely frozen on discovering the pretty graceful head of Impéria, who was looking out at me, from the side scene. She had arrived a moment before, and knowing how much Bellamare was interested in me, she also felt an interest in my *début*. She listened to me, she studied me; nothing could escape her examination. Everything

seemed to spin round before my eyes, which, probably, became confused and wild. I felt as if flooded with light, although the illumination was not brilliant, and I could have wished to hide myself in any twilight which would have veiled my defects. The fear of being ridiculous paralyzed me, and when I should have shown a little passion, I felt that my acting was so awkward and so bad, that I had a mad impulse to escape into the greenroom; I cannot say how I regained it, or if I shortened my part. I was ready to faint; I staggered like a drunken man. Bellamare was entering on the stage; he had only time to say to me in passing:—

"Courage! that was very well!"

"No, it was very bad," I said to Impéria, who extended her hand to me, as if to sustain me; "have I not been bad, superlatively bad?"

"Bah!" she answered, "you are timid, that is all; certainly more timid than I would have believed, and more than you yourself expected probably. It is always so, but it passes off with habit."

I had passed unnoticed with the public, but not with my companions. Léon, who already loved me, was sad. Lambesq, who already detested me, was radiant; he affected to pity me. Léon shunned me; he did not feel the courage to address me; Régine said unceremoniously, "What a pity that he should have an empty stomach! such a handsome fellow!"

Even Purpurin muttered between his teeth: "It is not M. Lawrence who will cast M. Talma into the shade just yet!"

I was retiring sadly to my garret, certain that I should not close my eyes all night, when Moranbois called me to take a *bock* with him. I longed only to hide myself, and I refused.

"You are proud," said he, "because you have been at college, while I was brought up on the dunghill?"

"If you take it so," I replied, "I will drink anything you wish."

When we were seated in a corner of the brewery, "I wish to speak to you," he said; "and it is in the name of Bellamare, who has not time this evening. Must he not be chattering with this princess that he calls his daughter?"

"Is it of Mademoiselle Impéria that you speak in that fashion?"

"Yes. I permit myself that liberty, with your leave, youngster! Impéria is no more to me than any one else. She does nothing wrong as yet; but patience, her turn will come, and Bellamare, who always sees angels hovering above her, will find out later that he must not trust in any daughter of the theatre, let her stockings be of silk or all in holes. But enough of that; Bellamare charged me to console you for your misadventure of this evening. The fact is, you were very bad. I expected that, but you have gone beyond my expectations."

"If this is the way you console me—"

"Does monsieur want compliments?"

"I know that I was detestable; and I am mortified, profoundly mortified by it. What pleasure can you find in increasing it?"

"If you take it in that way, little one, that is another thing. Tell me, then, why, having rehearsed passably, you became all at once so cold and gloomy?"

"How do I know? Can timidity be accounted for?"

"Ah, here it is! You had gone so far without embarrassment, and believing yourself above your audience. You were like the savage who drinks wine without knowing that it will make him tipsy. Ah well! distrust yourself in future. Have your fright beforehand, and you will have less on the stage. The tribute must be paid, either in advance or at the time. I say this for your good, and on the part of your director. He believes that nothing is lost, and that you will do better next time."

"He believes it because he is good, indulgent, and an optimist; but you, who are candid, do not believe a word of it."

"Do you wish me to tell you your trouble, without mincing matters?"

"Yes, tell me everything."

"Well, then, my boy, you will never succeed so long as you wish to please Impéria."

And as, surprised by the penetration of this Hercules, my hand shook, in setting down my glass, he added, fixing his pale and steady eyes on mine: "You are astonished that Moranbois sees clearer than the others? It is even so; he sees everything. You are infatuated with this young lady; you are with us to be near her. It is an affected creature, and a true *cabotine*, who looks only for success. When one does not work for the sole pleasure of doing

well, one works badly, you see ; and when he does it for the sake of a woman, he only commits follies. I have warned you : that is enough. I have nothing more to say to you."

And he left me, without allowing me to answer.

I had leisure to meditate on the sad consequence of my failure, for I could not sleep all night. My mis-hap naturally assumed inordinate proportions in my eyes. Sleeplessness is a magnifying-glass which, on the walls of the brain, exaggerates hairs to beams, or an ant to a hippopotamus. I began to doze, only to awake with a start, beneath a shower of apples, which a gust of wind blew even over my bedclothes. Sometimes it seemed to me as if, in this good town of Orleans, where certainly no one thought of me, they were walking through the streets with lanterns in their hands, and that the object of this illumination was that all the citizens might assemble and say, "Did you notice how bad that young actor was in the comedy?"

"You were not bad," said Léon to me, next day. "You merely lost the opportunity to be good."

"But can one be good in so weak a rôle?"

"One can play it properly ; that is, seek the exact limit of the character. You found that boundary at rehearsal. Why did you stop short of it?"

"I was paralyzed."

"It is a very slight accident, and may perhaps be the only one. Try not to do like me, who, since the beginning, have failed, never to retrieve myself again."

"What is that you say? If I had

a quarter of your talent, I should think myself very fortunate."

"My dear Lawrence, I have not the shadow of talent. Do not speak of that, it saddens me, and does no good."

As he really seemed sad, I dared not insist. He was one of those who will not be consoled. But how surprised I was by his discouragement! What had he then aspired to, since he was not content with success in all his rôles, and had more parts at his disposal than he cared for?

I asked Bellamare's opinion on the subject. He considered a little, and replied :—

"Léon speaks and thinks like a man of disappointed ambition. To hear him, one would often fancy him ungrateful ; but when you see him act, you feel the lofty generosity of a noble character. So I can only attribute his disgust with life to some morbid tendency of his temperament. If he were at the topmost round of the ladder, at the pinnacle of every species of triumph, he would still be dreaming of some purer glory, though to find it he might have to go to the moon. But let us talk of yourself, my boy. You were put out last night. That is no matter. You must learn your lesson over, and begin again to-morrow. This time, you have a better part in the second play, and can retrieve yourself."

Instead of making amends, I was colder than at my *début*. The same terror took possession of me, although I entered on the stage without apparent emotion. My face and person sustained the public gaze without confusion, and I appeared sufficiently

at my ease. As soon as my own voice struck my ear, my head whirled dizzily. I hastened to recite my rôle like a task from which I longed to be rid, and produced on the spectator the effect of a self-sufficient gentleman, who despises his audience, and takes no pains with his performance.

The actor's embarrassment assumes every imaginable form, contrary to his purpose. There is no false appearance that it does not borrow, no lie that it does not invent for its disguise. The phenomenon it wrought in my case was the most grievous which could have happened to me; for I was genuinely modest and desirous of doing well, while I was condemned to the mask of impertinence. The condition was not absolutely new to Bellamare, who had seen everything in the course of his strolling professorship; nevertheless, I afforded so glaring an instance of it, that he was somewhat taken aback, and I read in his expressive glance more compassion than encouragement.

As for me, I was so thoroughly wretched, that my companions sought to console me. Moranbois himself, after his characteristic fashion, said a few encouraging words; but Impéria said nothing, and that cut me to the quick. In all other respects she talked to me with sweetness and good-will; only she shunned the least allusion to my disaster, and I knew not what to think of her opinion of my future. I resolved to unburden my mind, and made bold to seek a *tête-à-tête* with her.

It was much easier to find an opportunity for this in the province than in Paris. If the lot of inferior

companies is unhappy and distressing, that of those who are merely passable is very agreeable, in the generality of towns. For those which have no permanent theatre, the arrival of a strolling troupe is always an event. Besides, there is everywhere a certain number of amateurs who have a passion, not so much for acting as for actors. Everywhere, the young men of family attempt to hover and strut about the actresses. Everywhere, also, there are literary persons, young or old, with unpublished manuscripts in their pockets, who, without hoping to secure their performance, dream at least of the delightful pleasure of reading them to actors. Whence ensued relations in which those interested naturally bore all the expenses, invitations, country excursions, with hunting, fishing, dinners, and entertainments, *according to the giver's means*. These amusements were always very gay, thanks to the good-humor of the actors, who knew how to escape with tact from literary wasp's-nests; and to the coquetry of the actresses, who knew how to avoid the pitfalls of gallantry, when it seemed advisable.

Bellamare had no objection to these pleasure-parties. He was too well known everywhere to be accused of taking any mean advantage. His wit and knowledge were a full equivalent, and his good advice well worth all the dinners in the world. They knew that he was very fatherly with his *pensionnaires*, and he was rarely invited without the rest of us. Régine loved good eating, and Lucinde to make fine toilets; but Léon,

fond of solitude, fastidious in the choice of his acquaintance, and sensitively proud, declined almost all the invitations. Moranbois, who was the busiest of the company, and who, besides, did not like the constraint of good society, preferred to rest an hour or two at the *café*, with Purpurino Purpurini, on whom he lavished fearful invectives while regaling him, and who treated him in return with profound disdain. These two irreconcilable enemies could never do without each other, for some unknown reason.

I confess that on receiving the first collective invitation, in which our manager included me, I was strongly inclined to follow Léon's example. I had not, like him, the ideas and habits of a gentleman, but I had preserved the pride of the peasant, who dislikes to receive what he cannot return. Léon did not blame Bellamare for loving this joyous and easy life, since he brightened it with the light of his intelligence and the charm of his playfulness; but he considered himself disagreeable, and nothing was more tedious, according to him, than an ill-humored parasite.

I had not the same motive for entertaining scruples. I was naturally gay; but, as an artist, I had, as yet, shown only my defects. I was, perhaps, doomed to be a nonentity. I had no right to the cordial reception vouchsafed to the others. Discretion would have commanded me, then, to abstain; but Impéria was at all these entertainments, and I decided to join them, however my pride might suffer. I saw plainly that Léon disap-

proved of me. I pretended not to notice it.

The first party was given us by some garrison officers, a half-dozen of whom came to invite us to a picnic which they had been planning among themselves for a long time. It was all arranged with us, when Captain Vachard, the highest in command, changed the project from a boating excursion, with dinner on the grass, to that of a regatta on the waters of his brother, Baron Vachard, who had a country-seat, and a park intersected by a small arm of the Loire. The offer did not greatly please the others, but among the military they do not consult their own preference when a superior is of the party and they had to renounce the picnic to accept the Baron's invitation. It was privately suggested to us that the Captain much preferred dispensing the hospitality of his brother's larder and wine-cellar to pay in his share of the costs, and that he amused himself only at the expense of others.

These first ideas which I received of the Captain's character prejudiced me so strongly against him, that I proposed to renounce the *fête*. Léon expressed himself very plainly as to our folly in submitting to the whim of such a miserly fellow. Impéria said that she would do whatever Bellamare decided. Bellamare, who, by dint of strolling, had become a little careless in matters of small consequence, decided that it should be put to vote. The majority declared gayly for the regatta in the waters of the Baron. They delighted in ridiculing the hospitality proffered

them, when it afforded a chance for criticism; and to punish the Captain for the tone of authority which he had assumed with his lieutenants and sub-lieutenants in this affair, the women resolved to keep a light rein over him.

We had to travel three leagues in a carriage or on horseback to reach the Baron's chateau. Saddle-horses were procured for the ladies who wished to display their horsemanship. Neither Bellamare nor Lambeq cared for riding, and a carriage was brought us, in which they invited me to take a seat, together with them and Régina. By this arrangement our three young actresses, Impéria, Lucinde, and Anna, were accompanied by the officers, and we followed after, like peaceful and confident guardians. It seemed to us that Vachard had premeditated this triumphal departure from the town, and had reserved for himself the principal rôle, for he prepared to lead the procession, with Impéria, who abandoned herself without reflection to the innocent pleasure of managing the Captain's gentle mare. I remarked openly that we, the manager, my companions, and myself, should form a most ridiculous rear-guard. A young second comedian, called Marco, whom we had enlisted a few days before, and who was a thorough madcap, caught my meaning and bounded into the saddle behind Lucinde, swearing that he would descend from it only at the point of the bayonet, since it was the duty of the cavalry to bear the infantry, in case of need. Lucinde, whose stately equilibrium was deranged by this

invasion, grew red with anger, and Bellamare interfered very gently, for he declared that he was not manager in the country; and this comical discussion was prolonged, to the great chagrin of Vachard, and amid the loud laughter of the audience, when I cut it short. Seeing everybody in good-humor, and catching sight of the Captain's horse, which a soldier held, while the Captain strove to recall Marco to more suitable conduct, I vaulted upon this handsome and well-equipped horse; I mounted so quickly that the soldier, astounded, dropped the reins, and I went off like an arrow, signing to Impéria to follow me. She understood me, she approved my course, and besides her mare was accustomed to follow the beast of which I had taken possession. I did not know how to mount by rule, but I had nervous legs, a supple body, and the hardihood of a peasant. To be surer of myself, I had dispensed with the stirrups, and I galloped as when across the fields I bruised the freshly cut grass without saddle or bridle, and with a rope for all rein. Impéria, likewise reared in the country, and well versed in all noble exercises, was a remarkable horsewoman. In the twinkling of an eye we had cleared the great Place du Martroy and the whole town of Orleans, followed at a considerable distance by the cavalcade, who laughed, shouted, and applauded. The young officers were delighted with my audacity, and the trick played off upon their Captain. As for him, he did not laugh very heartily, as you may imagine; but not to attract attention to the ridiculous

incident to which he must submit, he hastily took his place in the carriage, with Bellamare and Marco, who had given up *protecting* the ladies, when he saw me rise so opportunely to the honor of our company. Naturally, the carriage-horse, whose reins Vachard had taken, and which he lashed vainly with his whip, could not overtake the equestrians. Impéria had begged me to wait for them; but when they were near us, excited by their cheers, we set off again at a furious pace, resolved not to let them pass us, and not to give the Captain the possibility of rejoining us.

At length we reached the place where we must leave the banks of the Loire, and go inland, and there we no longer knew the way. The race had given my companion an animation that I had never seen in her before.

"How beautiful you are!" I cried, desperately, when she stopped to ask me what direction we must take.

She had had confidence in me, you remember, since the day when I had sworn not to think of making love to her. So she did not take my exclamation and emotion in bad part.

"I ought to be like that upon the stage, you think?" rejoined she, "and not cold as I am. Ah well, I could say as much for you; unfortunately we cannot act on horseback."

The moment had come to ask her what she thought of me, and the opportunity was excellent. Our horses needed to breathe, they were streaming with sweat. We let the bridles fall upon their necks, rightly thinking that they would find the way themselves, and, as we were now in

advance of the others, we could exchange a few words.

"You pretend," said I to Impéria, "that you are cold upon the stage. Is it to console me for being frigid?"

"You are frigid, it is true; but that is little matter, if you are not frozen."

"Indeed, I fear that I shall always be both."

"You cannot be certain."

"What do you think of it yourself?"

"Nothing, yet; it is too soon."

"And, besides, you do not care."

"Why do you say that?"

"It seemed so to me."

"Why?"

"You cannot feel much interest in me."

"What have I done, then, to lose the confidence that you accorded me? Come, say!"

"You have the air of no longer knowing if I exist."

"If I have that air, it is false. I talk of you constantly with Bellamare, and I told him yesterday that I loved you and esteemed you more every day."

"Why? I entreat you, tell me why. I would like so much to know in what I can deserve your friendship, and that of M. Bellamare!"

"I can very easily tell you why; you are kind, sincere, devoted, intelligent, free from vice. In short, you are equal to Léon, and you are more lively, more amiable, and more social."

"I am very happy, then; but still, if I never have ability."

"Then, unhappily, you will leave us."

"Why? Could I not make myself useful in some other rôle than that of lover? Many people make a living on the stage, without possessing talent."

"They live poorly. One should not follow a profession that he does not love."

"But I love the theatre, in spite of my inferiority, and there are many others like me."

"Then keep on, if you are not ambitious —"

"I am not ambitious, I am — I really do not know what I am."

"I will tell you. You have artistic tastes, and you will probably be an artist, whether you succeed as an actor or do something else. You love this careless life, because it is precarious, these travels, these new faces and new countries, to observe, enjoy, or criticise; above all, you like what I like best about it, being associated with a group, amiable or not, a medley, diverting or affecting, or faulty and irritating, — a multiplicity of life, in short. It is like family life, after all, without its interminable chains, its deep anguish, and its horrible responsibilities. But it seems to me that with Bellamare for manager, one cannot be absolutely unhappy, and everything in the lot which he creates for us amuses or interests me."

"I feel like you, in all respects. Then, if forever lacking in talent and success, I still cling to this sweet and careless life, you will not regard me as one of those unhappy fools who cherish a ridiculous delusion? You will not despise me?"

"Certainly not, for I am in the selfsame situation. I follow a ca-

reer in which I am by no means sure of success; and I feel that I should persist in it, in one way or another, even if I found I had no real ability. That is the way, you see! When one is stage-struck, everything else loses its relish."

"Still, it is not your natural and final lot. From day to day you meet with opportunities of making what is called a brilliant marriage."

"I do not wish to make a brilliant marriage."

"Still, you would not wish to make one that would plunge you into destitution?"

"No, on account of the children I might have; for, if it concerned only myself, for my own part I am indifferent to all privations. With economy and industry one can always obtain the necessaries of life."

"Let me tell you, then, that no one knows you. All our comrades think you prudent, cold, ambitious even. Bellamare has predicted a grand future for you, and they imagine that you would sacrifice everything to this end."

"If I believed it, perhaps I should regard it as a sacred duty to sacrifice all to it; but I credit it too little to consider it seriously. I do my best; I try to understand, and wait."

"And you do not suffer while waiting? you are gay?"

"So you see!"

"Because you are sure of him who loves you —"

"Have I said that any one loves me?"

"You have said that you loved some one."

"That is another thing."

"Would you love an ungrateful—"

"Perhaps he is not ungrateful; suppose he does not suspect my preference—"

"Then he is blind, an idiot, a regular brute!"

She burst out laughing, and her gayety made my heart leap with joy. I fancied she had invented this love as a defence from foolish declarations, in some moment of fear or *ennui*, and that her heart was as free as her existence. She was playful enough to have improvised this malice; for since the beginning of our journey she had revealed her character, always reserved before strangers, but admirably lively and even mischievous with her companions; and, as she was neither cunning nor deceitful, she could not seek to impose on me in *elle-d'elle*.

"Then," I cried, "you have been making sport of us; you love no one?"

She turned around, as if about to reply; but, seeing a horseman who had advanced beyond the others, her cheek whitened, and she said, directing my attention to him: "It is the Captain! I believe he has taken the horse of one of his young officers. So they are cowards, these soldiers? They dared not preserve us from this encounter!"

"Ah well, what then? What do you fear from this Vachard?"

"I fear—I know not what, a quarrel with you!"

"In your presence? I will not grant him that satisfaction. Let us give him a race, since he invites us to it."

"That is best," she answered, "let us fly!"

We were borne on, as if by the wind, until we reached a great, ugly house, absurdly painted rose-color, and our horses plunged us into a court-yard, where three pots of geraniums, barred from the sun, together with two hideous lions, in *terra-cotta*, completed the decorations of the mansion.

It was Baron de Vachard in person, who received us with a stupefied air, but who, recognizing our horses, understood, or supposed, that we belonged to the number of his invited guests. He was a man of about forty-five, very little older than his brother, the Captain; indeed, they may have been twins, I have forgotten now. They bore an extraordinary likeness to each other; the same short, strongly built figure, high shoulders, fresh color, thin and grizzled light hair, short nose, that seemed as if it had been forgotten, prominent eyes, projecting ears, set on toward the front like those of skittish horses, angular and very heavy jaw; only the expression of these two faces, cast in the same mould, differed essentially. That of the elder was mild and stupid, that of the Captain stupid and irritable. They seemed equally addicted to habits of order and economy. They had another habit, or rather infirmity in common, which we were not slow to perceive.

The Baron, having noticed that the horses were in a frightful state, gave orders for their grooming, without asking if we were not warm or thirsty ourselves; then he conducted

us in silence, into a very cool and very gloomy saloon, and there, after a certain effort, as if to collect his thoughts, he said to us, with an air of distress, "Where is my brother, then?"

"He is coming," I replied; "he was close upon our heels."

"Ah, very well!" replied he.

And he waited for us to take the initiative in conversation; Impéria maliciously waited for him to begin it; and I waited, through curiosity, the result of this reciprocal waiting.

The Baron, either from absence of mind or lack of brains, found absolutely nothing to say to us, and walked up and down the apartment, pursing up his lips in a singular manner; one would have said that he was mentally whistling some musical reminiscence. We were assured of it, when the sound, grown almost distinct, permitted us to recognize an interpretation *sui generis* of the *bravura* of *La Dame Blanche*. He became aware of his preoccupation, and looked at us, made a great effort to break the silence, and remarked that it was fine weather. The same perfidious silence on the part of Impéria. He turned his round eyes toward me, as if to question me. I averted mine to see how he would extricate himself from his embarrassment. He freed himself from it, by a short pause before the window, and by a more distinct repetition of the phrase, *Ah quel plaisir d'être soldat!* with the accompaniment of a rhythm drummed upon the glass; after which he sprang outside, without appearing to remember us.

Impéria laughed merrily. I made a sign to her, for I had just perceived in the farther part of the room a person whom the abrupt transition from bright sunlight to obscurity had at first rendered invisible to us. She was a tall, stout woman, of brunette complexion, once handsome, Mademoiselle de Sainte-Claire, of whom we had heard, formerly Mademoiselle Clara, a provincial actress, who personated fashionable coquettes, now M. de Vachard's companion and housekeeper.

"Pay no attention to the Baron's manners," she said with unconcern. "His brother and he, — well, they are a pair! You did not come to be entertained by his conversation, did you, but to pass a day in the country? It will not be very amusing, I warn you. Among stupid people all is stupid; but the dinner will be choice, I give you my word. The Baron is an epicure, — his only talent, as far as I know; as to the other, he has not even that. But what have you done with the more idiotic of the Vachards?"

And without waiting for any answer, she ordered refreshments for us, and kept on talking to us, without reserve or ceremony before the servants.

"Come, now, my little ones," she resumed, "which ones of Balandar's company are you? Ah! pardon, you call him Bellamare, at present; it is his theatrical name; he called himself Ballandar, formerly; perhaps that was not his name either. You know we take what names we wish, or can. Just now, I am a noble maiden lady who has had misfor-

tunes. Always the same trick, you know! The Vachards that we meet on the way do not believe it, but they love to persuade themselves of it, and they repeat it to their friends and acquaintances; it sounds well. Your manager must have spoken of me to you. He loved me well once, in the days when I was a young and pretty girl, slender as you, my little one, and he — I will not say, my boy, that he was handsome as you, but he had youth, wit, and a certain charm with women. Does he still adore them all at once, the good-for-nothing? On my word, I have been very jealous of him, and I revenged myself well. But tell me, little one, you are not the one that they say is his delight at present, — the beautiful Impéria?"

Impéria reddened for the second time. She had already colored, when this woman had spoken of noble adventures; she was entirely disconcerted on receiving this open insult; but, as I was about to reply, she forestalled me, and answered with vivacity, —

"I am the delight of no one; and I am not beautiful, as you see."

"That is true, you are small and without brilliancy; but you are pretty, and, since you come alone, with this tall, handsome fellow, you are lovers, my turtle-doves, married perhaps? In short, it is not you who are the latest fancy of your manager and of our Captain. This handsome Leander who accompanies you would not suffer it."

"Then there is in our troupe," I demanded, "a person whom the Captain boasts of having captivated?"

"Ah yes! the famous Impéria, whom I am wild to see!"

"He boasts of it?" I repeated, crimson with anger, while poor Impéria grew pale, and cast on me one of those agonized glances that seem involuntarily to appeal to the first honest man for protection or vengeance.

"He does not boast of it, perhaps," replied Sainte-Claire; "he confides it to all his regiment, and it is in response to this confidence that the Baron, who is not liberality itself, has launched out to-day with a grand dinner for his brother's mistress. I must tell you that the Baron is jealous of me, because the Captain also makes love to me; so he is charmed when the Captain pays court to others. But however the Captain diverts himself, he will always return to me, who hold the purse-strings, you understand!"

Impéria took my arm, as if to go away. She was so agitated that I thought she was about to swoon, and her name escaped me. Sainte-Claire, perceiving the blunder she had just made, perhaps intentionally, evinced no confusion, but, with the unconcern of ill-bred people, burst out laughing.

"Let us go," said Impéria, leading me away. "It is a shame for me to come in contact with such persons."

"Let us stay," I answered. "Stay, since you are with me; despise this impudent duenna, who lies perhaps through jealousy; and let us see if the Captain really boasts of it."

"I understand you, Lawrence! you wish to give him a lesson. I forbid you. You have no right."

"It is my right and my duty: remember, you said farewell forever to the world which you left. You are an artist; you have in me, in each of your associates, a brother, whose honor is responsible for yours. I cannot say if Lambesq is of my opinion; but in my place Bellamare, Léon, Moranbois himself, perhaps even little Marco, would not let you be insulted. If we were gentlemen, our protection might compromise you; but we are actors, and prejudice does not forbid us to have courage."

"If all do not possess it," she replied, "you are one of those who have it in abundance, I know well; and therefore I am unwilling —"

She could not say more: the Captain, red as a beet, and covered with perspiration, approached us, with the evident intention of reproaching us for our prank. I advanced three steps to meet him, and looked at him in a way to disconcert him, for he stammered some unintelligible words, wreaked his wrath on a geranium, which he nearly uprooted from the pot in which it languished, assumed a forced smile, contracted his lips, as his brother had done when receiving us in the saloon, and passed on whistling the same air. They had the same odd trick, and in the regiment they had christened them the brothers Fufu.

When Impéria saw that the Captain did not seek to quarrel with me, she grew more and more reassured, and determined to laugh off the adventure.

"Truly, I am foolish," she said to me; "I still have pruderies that do not suit my profession. I assure

you, Lawrence, that I blushed at my anger directly after. Our vocation is to amuse others; our philosophy should be to amuse ourselves with them when they are ridiculous, and not suffer ourselves to be wounded, especially when we are good for anything."

I allowed her to believe that the affair was ended, and we hastened to rejoin the joyous band, who were already starting on the Baron's waters. Figure to yourself three wheries upon a long, stagnant pool, and you can fancy the regatta. In a twinkling I perceived that all my companions had evil intentions, and that the young officers had guilty hopes, the project or desire of all being to give the Captain a ducking. The women understood us, and would not enter the boats, except Sainte-Claire, who jumped heavily and resolutely on board the leading craft, and took the rudder, while the Captain seized the oars and begged Impéria to trust herself to him. Instead of her, it was I who accepted the invitation, after having communicated by signs with Marco, who steered the second boat, and Bellamare, who had charge of the third. Soon, in place of a regatta, a naval combat was improvised, and the two boats together executed a furious onslaught against ours. Their object was to throw the Captain over, in the confusion of the struggle, and amid a fearful hubbub. I strove to effect it, while appearing to defend him; and the thing would have been easily managed, if Sainte-Claire, who was not duped, and who bore up bravely against fortune, had not turned

against me, calling me traitor, with loud laughter and coarse jests. She was strong as a man, and brave as a woman who is fighting. I allowed her to declare herself against me, and try to throw me overboard. Then I called to my aid my natural dexterity, for I would not use my strength with a woman, however little feminine she might be; and with the same trip I launched into the Baron's green waters his amiable brother and his valiant housekeeper. Then I leaped on board the other boat, which let itself be captured, and shouted victory, which brought more honor than pleasure to Vachard, pickling with Sainte-Claire in the shallow but turbid water.

They seemed to take it in good part, and every one was deceived except me. They thought the Captain had a better temper than they had given him credit for; and dinner passed off with a noisy gayety that did not suffer any particular allusion to the events of the morning; but, as we were passing under an arbor to smoke and drink coffee, the younger Vachard, approaching me, said in a low voice, with a dry clear tone that contrasted with his wine-seasoned look, "You have ruined my horse and spoiled my uniform; you have done it purposely."

"I have done it purposely," I answered calmly.

"It is enough," replied he.

And he withdrew.

At daybreak the next morning I received a visit from two officers, friends of the Captain, who summoned me to retract the declaration I had made him, or to render him

satisfaction for my words. The first point I refused; the second I accepted, and the meeting was appointed for the day following at the close of the performance, for I was needed in the play. Singularly enough, I was not agitated by this first duel as I have been since then in other encounters. My cause appeared so just to me; I hated so cordially the man who insulted Impéria, and who had intended to compromise her before the very eyes of her companions! I regarded myself as the natural champion of the company; and although I possessed very little knowledge of fencing, while Vachard was well skilled in it, I did not doubt for a moment that fate would favor the right. What was stranger still, I played very well this evening. I had, it is true, a good rôle, which I had accepted with some trepidation, but which I filled to the satisfaction of every one. I felt raised above myself, by my confidence in myself as a man, and I forgot to distrust myself as an actor. At one time in the performance I even played very finely, and was applauded for the first and last time in my life. The excellent Bellamare embraced me, weeping for joy, as soon as the curtain had fallen; Impéria pressed my hands with effusion.

"Come, beautiful princess," said a harsh voice from behind me, "embrace him also, if you have a particle more heart than a grasshopper."

At this agreeable interruption from Moranbois Impéria smiled, and turned her cheek to me, saying, "If

it is any recompense, let him take it!"

I kissed her with too much confusion to appreciate the pleasure; my heart choked me. Moranbois struck me on the shoulder, saying in my ear, "Chevalier of the fair sex, they await you!"

How did he know of my affair, when I had concealed it with the greatest care? I have no idea, but his announcement made me leap with joy. My lips had just been drinking in the perfume of my ideal, and I felt as if my stature had gained a hundred cubits. I could have overthrown a legion of devils.

"Friend," said I to Moranbois, who had followed me into the dressing-room, and, with most unprecedented politeness, was assisting me to dress; "you have been fencing-master in a regiment; how does one go to work, when he knows nothing about it, to disarm his man?"

"He goes to work as best he can," he answered; "have you coolness, idiot?"

"Yes."

"Ah well, have no hesitation; go straight ahead, blockhead, and you will kill him."

This prediction produced no sinister impression upon me. Did I desire to kill him? No, certainly, I am very humane and not revengeful. I could not see clearly beneath the spell that influenced me. I wished to conquer, but I did not think myself skilful enough to choose the means of doing so. I knew my adversary to be formidable, but I did not fear him; that is all I recollect of this rapid drama, in which I

played the part of an impassioned man. At that moment I should have regarded any philosophic scruple as an argument of fear.

I had taken Léon and Marco for seconds; I desired that the affair should be clearly an engagement between soldiers and artists. Vachard having the choice of weapons, we fought with swords. I do not know what passed. For two or three minutes I saw a scintillation at the end of my arm, I felt a burning heat in my breast, as if my blood, in haste to leave me, was rushing out to meet a thousand sword-points. I thought to parry an attack, when Vachard rolled upon the grass. It seemed to me as if my weapon had crossed the space: I sought my adversary opposite, and he was dying at my feet.

I had fancied myself cool, but I perceived that I was completely intoxicated; and when I heard the regimental surgeon say, "He is dead," I thought that he was speaking of me, and was astonished to find myself still standing.

At last I understood that I had just killed a man; but I felt no remorse, for he had had ninety-nine chances to my one, and I was wounded in the arm. I did not perceive it till they came to dress it, and at that moment I saw the livid face of Vachard, who seemed absolutely lifeless. I felt a chill through all my body, but my mind took no real cognizance of it.

He was seriously injured, but he recovered; he was not worthy of a dramatic end. He has lost his brother since then, and has married the Sainte-Claire, who styles herself

at present Baroness de Vachard, but who gives no more regattas.

As for me, I was surprised on leaving the scene of the duel to see Moranbois beside me. He had followed me, and, without showing himself, had witnessed the affair. Silently he conducted me home, and silently he passed the night with me. I was agitated, and I dreamed continually, but only of the theatre, not of the combat. On awaking I perceived my Hercules sleeping in a chair behind my curtains. He replied to my thanks by a vituperation; but he pressed my hand, saying that he was satisfied with me.

My wound was not serious, and notwithstanding the warning of the surgeon, for whose visit I did not wait, I hastened to make inquiries concerning my victim's condition. It seemed hopeless; but by evening there was less cause for anxiety, and I was able to attend rehearsal, without emotion, and without having my arm in a sling.

I supposed that no one at the theatre knew anything about the matter, for in the city nothing had as yet transpired; but Moranbois had told my companions everything, and Bel-lamare received me with open arms.

"You showed us last night," he said, "that you were an actor, but it needed not this affair of honor to convince us that you were a man. Ah! do not habituate yourself to these amusements; now that you have talent, it would be disagreeable for me to see my handsome young *premier* return with his eyes put out, or crippled. I shall insert it in your next engagement that duelling is for-

bidden on account of your duties at the theatre."

While thus jesting with a lively manner, he had a tear in the corner of his eye. I saw that he loved me, and I embraced him tenderly. Impéria also embraced me, saying, —

"Do not repeat this."

She then added in an undertone, "Lawrence, you are good and brave, but every one here believes — what is not, and what cannot be. Be considerate also, and let it be understood that you do not think of me."

"And what matters it to you?" I replied, wounded by her preoccupation, after the crisis from which I had hardly emerged, and whose palpitations still shook my breast. "When they would tell you that I love you, would it be a disgrace for you?"

"No, certainly," said she, "but —"

"But what? That one whom you prefer would be unwilling?"

"If I prefer any one, he does not think of me, as I have told you. Only, I accepted your friendship, and cannot pledge myself to anything more. Must everything be changed between us? Shall I be obliged to put a constraint upon myself, to be reserved, to treat you as a young man with whom one counts her words and even her glances, that she may not seem to act coquettishly or foolishly? You know well that I wish to remain free, and that, on that account, I must not suffer myself to love. If you are my friend, you will not enter on a contest which has always terrified me and put me to flight. You do not wish to spoil a happiness that I have gained with so

much difficulty, after troubles and misfortunes of which you have no idea?"

I was governed by her. I swore to her that I would always be her brotherly associate, and that she should not have to protect herself from my besiegings. I did not think to accuse her of coldness or selfishness, although the fact might have appeared patent to me, since she was not in love with another, or overcome that love that she might not undergo its consequences.

Léon was pleased with me also, and he told me so with effusion. Régine overwhelmed me with caresses, Anna began to admire me as a hero, Lambesq detested me more, little Marco conceived an infatuation for me, and made himself my shadow. Purpurin, wishing to testify his esteem, called me M. de Lawrence; Moranbois, while continuing to treat me roughly, ceased to call me bumpkin. The lowest employee of the theatre believed himself ennobled by my glory; in one day I had become the lion of the troupe.

They soon began to discuss the event in the city. The regiment acknowledged as little as possible the rude lesson, given by a strolling player to an officer. Vachard was neither loved nor respected; but although at heart their sympathies were with me and not with him, the *esprit de corps* did not allow them to take my part, and some of them spoke of a chance thrust on my side, followed by an awkward one. The civilians did not consent that I should play so insignificant a rôle, and in the coffee-houses there were

tolerably sharp arguments concerning me. The soldier loves the actor, without whom he would perish of *ennui* in the barracks, but he does not like to have a *pékin** an adept with the sword; while among the civilians they were delighted to see a *pékin* of the lowest rank, that is, an actor, cope with military bullies.

In higher circles, at the prefecture at the general's, and in the city drawing-rooms, they were excited, they questioned and commented; the ultra respectable people were scandalized at the ardor with which overhasty young spirits extolled me, to such a degree that Bellamare, acute and prudent as experience, assembled us on the eve of the advertised performance, and said to us with his accustomed playfulness:—

"My little children, we have gathered palms of glory in this good town; but military glory is denied the artist, and from various intelligence that I have received, it seems that we bid fair to have a disturbance to-morrow evening in the parterre and even in the orchestra. We shall serve as a pretext for antipathies or ill-feeling of which we are ignorant, but for which the administration or public opinion would hold us responsible. The surest way is to paste a slip across the poster, and to secure our second-class carriage for this evening. Our persons absent, our glory will remain untarnished by the fisticuffs which may be forced to, buffet apple-cores to-morrow; for if the artist has his

* A name given to civilians bearing arms during insurrections or other disturbances.

devoted partisans, the warrior has his likewise. Let us make off, then, and may the gods of Olympus, Apollo, and Mars protect us!"

"Hurrah for Bellamare, who is always right!" cried Marco; "but hurrah for Lawrence also, whom none of us will ever disown!"

"Let us all cry 'Hurrah for Lawrence!' replied Bellamare. "He is our pride, all the same!"

"You counted on making money here," said I, "and my laurels cost you dearer than they are worth."

"My son," he replied, "money always comes to him who knows how to wait for it; and if it never comes, honor is more precious."

Before leaving, I wished to obtain some further news of Vachard, and I hastened to his house. The Baron himself received me in the dining-room, where his breakfast was served, and where, without recognizing me, so absent-minded was he, he offered me a chair. I thanked him, and was about to withdraw, when he remembered me.

"Ah! very well!" said he; "it is you who—fu—fu—you who have nearly killed my—fu—fu— You regret it; very well—fu—fu— An absurd quarrel, very unfortunate, very unfortunate! But what could he do? A soldier—fu—fu—is obliged to be hasty, and you had taken away his—fu—fu—his mistress—"

I felt that the blood mounted to my head, and that I was ready to quarrel with the Baron for having believed, and persisting in believing, his brother's impudent lie.

"How is he?" I broke in precipi-

tately; "I have nothing else to hear; do you hope to save him?"

"Yes, yes, fu—fu—we have hopes."

"Ah well, when he is recovered, have the kindness to tell him that I did not wish to quit the country, without leaving him my address, in case he should wish to repeat it."

And I gave him the name and address of my father, which he took and examined with a stupid air, saying: "Repeat it?—but no!—Why? repeat it with whom? Lawrence, fu—fu—nurseryman and kitchen-gardener, that is not you?"

"It is my father!"

"You are not a gentleman, then? They said fu—fu—that you were of good family!"

"I am of good family, with all deference to you."

"Then,—don't understand—"

And his stupefaction found vent in a humming so prolonged, that I profited by it to shrug my shoulders and retire.

Before the door I encountered one of the lieutenants who had been my accomplice at the regatta, and he detained me to chat about my duel for quarter of an hour. I was on the point of leaving him, having bidden him adieu, when we heard a strange and mysterious duet issue from the apartment on the ground-floor; it was the whistling of two persons, who seemed to repeat a lesson, sometimes replying to each other, and sometimes joining in concert.

"The Captain is out of danger," said the young officer to me; "he

whistles with his brother; I recognize his *fu fu*."

"How! you are sure? Day before yesterday he was as good as dead, and to-day he hums?"

"It is even so. When he was three quarters dead he whistled mentally, I'll be bound; and when he is really dead he will whistle in eternity."

"But in his present condition his idiot of a brother, instead of exciting him, ought to keep him quiet!"

"If you believe that either of them knows what he is about, you attribute more sense to them than they ever had. This muffled imitation of a flute, this collection of musical scraps, has been given them by Providence, to conceal from their own eyes, and to reveal to those of others, the absolute emptiness of their minds."

It was thus that I separated from the Vaclard whom I had run through, but who has never sought his revenge.

Now, monsieur, I shall soon arrive at the principal events of my recital, and I will pass over in silence that mass of adventures, disagreeable or ludicrous, which occur daily in the life of travellers, in that of actors more particularly. Of all nomads, we observe the closest and laugh the most at human life, because we seek everywhere for types to reproduce and exaggerate. Every ridiculous or eccentric person is a model who unwittingly poses for us. Comedians find an ample and continual harvest to reap. Serious actors, especially the lovers, are less favored. They can study manner,

expression, costume, and accent; but they very seldom have an opportunity (if they ever have it) of seeing acted and of hearing spoken the passion which they desire to express with charm or energy. One circumstance in their favor, however, is that they are generally endowed with very little intelligence, and are content with attitudes and intonations stereotyped and learned by heart. Unfortunately for me, I had a little good sense and reflection, and I found this fashion of speaking like everybody else a mere jugglery of all serious work and true inspiration. I told my trouble to Bellamare.

"You are right," he answered; "I can only teach you the notes with which one can repeat his playing, when he cannot grasp the chord. Each person should express according to his own nature, and the great artists are those who are all powerful in themselves. Know yourself, try yourself, and risk yourself."

I made vain efforts. I was filled with passion, but I could express it on the stage no more than in real life. This necessity of concealing love from her who inspired it was, perhaps, too great a sacrifice of my will, too great a sacrifice of myself. I could not find in fiction the accent which my inmost emotion wanted. At Beaugency, where I made my second essay, I did not regain the spirit which had animated me at Orleans, on the day of my duel. I was, according to my comrades, very good, that is to say, according to myself, very mediocre. I had improved in one respect, however, I had rid myself of the air

of impertinence or *coquetterie*. I acted suitably; if my rôle had a shade of timidity, I rendered it naturally; in short, I had found the *air* which became my age and my character. I had grown supportable, but I must remain insignificant; and the worst of the matter, was that Bellamare was satisfied with it, and all my companions sided with him. They loved me; they had begun to love me too well, to ask me only to stay with them, and not to see my faults.

This was also Impéria's frame of mind. I was too handsome, she declared, to displease the public. I was too good and too amiable for the company to be able to dispense with me.

As to the present, my object was attained. I had dreamed only of living near her, without being disagreeable to her; but as regarded the future, I saw not the slightest prospect of the fortune or renown which would have permitted me to aspire to be her support, and I must live on, from day to day, very gay, very spoiled, very happy, and at heart very hopeless.

On leaving Beaugency a very romantic adventure happened to me, which left its trace upon my life. I can relate it to you, without compromising any one, as you will see.

We were to go on to Tours, without stopping at Blois, where another company was in operation at that time. Léon asked Bellamare if he was willing to leave him in that town for a day or two. He had a friend there, who urged him to spend twenty-four hours with him. Bellamare replied that he could refuse nothing to so devoted a *pensionnaire*,

and that, besides, he also counted on stopping at Blois. Impéria asked to pass the night at the hotel, to take care of Anna, who had found herself quite seriously indisposed on leaving Beaugency, and needed a little rest.

The remainder of the troupe continued on their way toward Tours, under the direction of Moranbois. Bellamare installed himself with the two young actresses, in a hotel of the lower town; and Léon insisted on my taking up my quarters with him at the house of his friend, who would be pleased to know me and to entertain me. I accepted on condition that I should go there after the performance, and that he should not present me to his friend until the next morning; Bellamare had allowed me also twenty-four hours' leisure.

"Do not stand on ceremony," Léon said to me; "my friend is a bachelor, and you will be perfectly free at his house. At any hour of the night that you present yourself with your valise, the *concierge* will admit you and show you to your room. I will warn him, and he will expect you without waiting for you."

He gave me the address, and some directions, after which he left me. I was curious to see the acting of the troupe that occupied the town, and to know if other provincial lovers were better or worse than I. They were worse, which was little consolation. During the performance a fearful storm swept over the town, and it was still raining in torrents when we left the theatre amid a great confusion of carriages and umbrellas.

In the lobby of the theatre I met

a young artist whom I had known somewhat at Paris, and who took me to a neighboring *café* to await the end of the shower. He even offered to share his room with me, which was very near the theatre, and tried to dissuade me from seeking my lodging in the old town behind the hill, in the lost quarters, as he said, where it would be very difficult to direct me. I feared lest Léon, despite his promise, had taken the trouble to await me, and, as soon as the sky had grown a little clearer, I hastened in search of No. 23 of the street specified, whose name, with your permission, I will not speak.

I was indeed compelled to search for some time, to ascend I know not how many perpendicular flights of steps, to descend several others, and find my way at random in the picturesque, narrow, sombre, and completely deserted streets. The clock on an old church was striking one in the morning, when I at last ascertained that I was in the wished-for street, before the door of No. 23. Was it really 23? Was it not 25? I was about to ring, when a wicket was opened as if some one had heard me coming. Some one looked out at me; the door also was opened, and an old servant, whose face even I did not see, asked me, in a low voice, "Is it you?"

"It is I, certainly," I replied; "the friend whom they expect."

"Hush! hush!" she answered; "follow me."

I thought that everybody was asleep, or that there was some one sick in the house, and I followed my guide on tiptoe. She wore list shoes,

and walked like a phantom, her face veiled by her white cap. I ascended after her a winding staircase of the renaissance style, dimly lighted by a night-lamp, but seemingly of exquisite workmanship. I was in one of those ancient, well-preserved houses which form the interest and ornament of provincial towns,—of Blois in particular. At the first landing the old woman paused, opened a door with a delicately wrought lock, and said to me, "Enter, and above all do not go out."

"Never?" said I, laughing.

"Hush! hush!" she replied with a fearful tone, placing one finger on her lips.

Then I saw her pale and austere face, which appeared fantastic to me, and which faded into the shadow of the staircase like a dream.

"Evidently," thought I, "there is in this charming mansion a person at the point of death. This will not be cheerful, but perhaps I may be of some assistance to Léon at this painful moment."

And I penetrated into an apartment delicious in form, carving, and furniture. I reckoned on finding Léon there. I stepped noiselessly across an antechamber which preceded a delightful drawing-room, or rather boudoir, where there was a fire, an agreeable precaution in this stormy weather, which had drenched and chilled me; wax tapers burned in the candelabra, two great arm-chairs of rare design occupied the chimney-corners; but their cushions of Tours brocade, fresh and rounded, did not indicate that any one had sat there recently. The rich furniture,

arranged with scrupulous care, had the appearance of a residence long unoccupied. The lustre flashed its crystals discreetly, beneath a covering of silver gauze. The lace ruffles and covers on the arm-chairs were irreproachably white and stiff. Two pretty glass cupboards containing, one Chinese knick-knacks, the other little ornaments of old Saxony ware, were closed and locked. There was a work-table, denoting a woman's sojourn, whether transient or permanent; but this piece of furniture was empty, not a particle of thread or silk remained attached to its velvet lining.

At the back of the boudoir I saw a tapestry curtain which faced the chimney-piece, and which I lifted cautiously. Nothing but obscurity and silence. I took a taper, and penetrated into the most delicious sleeping-room that I had ever seen. It was blue, all hung with azure silk damask finished with fringes of white silk. A bed, white and gold, with fringed canopy and ample curtains of the same color and material as the hangings, occupied, like a monument, nearly one whole side of the chamber, which was not large, but was very lofty. Opposite the bed a mantel-piece of white marble, embossed with gilded copper, supported a timepiece in the Louis XVI. style, and of rare elegance; candlesticks with three branches, white and gold, like the clock; and two white marble Loves, which must have been the work of some quaint and skilful master. A commode, a secretary, and *étagères* of rosewood, with medallions of old Sèvres, a little sofa of

Chinese satin, two or three arm-chairs marvellously embroidered by hand, a red-brown carpet, sprinkled over with delicate sprays, a Venetian mirror in its frame of diamonded flowers, two large pastels representing beautiful ladies, very *décoiffée*, and who had a right to be so; I know not what beside; exquisite nothings placed on all the brackets;—all marked the sleeping-room of a woman, wealthy, artistic, fastidious, and elegant,—voluptuous, perhaps.

When I had made the inventory of this too comfortable asylum, I wondered if it had really been destined for me, and if the old housekeeper had not committed the monstrous blunder of introducing me there in the place of some marchioness.

Then I remembered that Léon had wealthy parents, that he had lived in the aristocratic world, and had friends in high life, and that the one whose hospitality I was receiving, being a bachelor and independent, there was nothing wonderful in his having fitted up a fine apartment in his elegant mansion for the use of some extravagant mistress, or some person of higher station, who came occasionally to his house for a mysterious rendezvous.

But why the deuce had they thus honored a poor strolling player, drenched and muddy, who would have been contented with a cross-bed in an attic, without descending from his usual habits? It seemed to me like an ironical magnificence. Had they no more modest lodging to offer a modest visitor in this princely house? Was it the apartment especially designed for friends? In

that case Léon should occupy it, and I began to look about for a second sleeping-room locked with the same key.

There was none. I resolved to install myself there gayly, convinced that I should discover next day that the housekeeper had lost her wits. It was her affair, and not mine: I was weary, I was cold, and my slight wound was somewhat painful, and my first astonishment giving place to the need of rest and sleep, I seated myself on the sofa, touched a match to the pile of kindlings heaped up in the fireplace, and began to take off my shoes, whose dusty-white prints I was ashamed to leave upon the carpet.

While regarding the reflection of the bed in the Venetian mirror, inclined toward me, I noticed that the silk counterpane had not been turned back, and there was nothing to indicate that this handsome couch was not merely for ornament. I raised the folds of damask, and perceived that there were neither sheets nor blankets on the mattress of white satin. This made me consider again. Evidently this luxurious lodging had not been designed for me, or surely there was a more modest bed somewhere within the reach of simple mortals. In vain I sought for it. Nothing in the dressing-closets; no alcove hidden in the wall; nothing to lie down on, unless the normal occupant of the blue room was a tiny ady capable of compressing herself within the limits of the little Chinese satin sofa. But as I already measured five feet five inches in height, there was no hope for me, even if I occupied

the whole of it, and I resigned myself, at first, to sleeping in a sitting posture; but after five minutes I was too warm, and stretched myself out on the carpet, in the middle of the chamber; five minutes later I was too cold. Decidedly, my scratch made me a little feverish; I found that Léon's proffered hospitality was a sorry jest, and forbidding me to leave the apartment appeared to me like the transparent stamp of a hoax. Still, Léon was not facetious. So absolute a silence reigned throughout the house, that one would have thought it deserted. The same silence in the street. The moon now fully, lighted up this sloping road, which descended in windings, bordered by walls overhung by wide-branched trees. The gardens were interspersed here and there by houses, which seemed to grow smaller and smaller, by reason of the declivity; there was no chance at night to distinguish between ancient hotels and modern villas, our age not having invented a characteristic architecture.

I dared not open the window, for I might still suppose that there was the precious sleep of illness to be regarded. But I saw very distinctly through the blue glass, and the picture I contemplated received a fantastic brightness from it, like that of an operatic moonlight. There were no shutters, the renaissance windows being in prismatic cross-bars. The lindens, all in blossom, lifted their great round heads above the wall in front; a little farther off, a vine-clad arbor was supported by pilasters on a terrace; on the right, a little struc-

ture, which might be a porter's lodge, resembled an antique tomb. I know not why this empty, silent street, with its low edifices, its elegant forms, and its squares of greenery, made me fancy how a suburb of Pompeii or a part of Tusculum must once have looked, seen in the gray of the morning. As a distant clock was striking half past one I decided to roll myself in my travelling-blanket, and stretch myself upon the satin mattress, drawing over me the vast counterpane, by which means I found myself most comfortably established, and fell speedily into that agreeable wandering which precedes a sweet sleep.

It was the first time in my life that I had occupied so rich and so downy a couch; it would probably be the last; I was not sorry to inhale the perfume of this elegant wealth and refined taste. The fire continued to crackle, and to cast great waves of light over the pictures, furniture, and ceiling, which last was painted to simulate light clouds upon a rosy sky. Gradually the fire died down, and clothed the whole with a soft and luminous atmosphere, which must have resembled the famous azure grotto. I asked myself if the influence of some kindred association might not have caused my dream. I recalled the farm-house where I had grown up; the great family-room with rough beams for a ceiling, whence hung clusters of shining onions and scarlet tomatoes by way of lustres; the walls covered with stew-pans and basins of gleaming copper; the noises which broke in upon my first sleep; the rocking of

the children's cradles; the dogs that barked in the court-yard, when the oxen stirred in the stable, or when a distant wagoner passed by, whose heavy cart crushed the gravel in regular cadence, and whose horses walking with equal step made the bells on their collars sing *do fa do re mi do*. Again I saw my mother, and the three poor children, younger than myself, who died in the same year; my father, still young, putting me to bed, while my mother nursed the last-born and drawing over my face the great rough linen sheet, which would prevent me from being disturbed by flies that might be earlier astir than I.

"Here," thought I, "there are no flies, but there are no sheets."

And I wondered naïvely if it was the custom of grantees to do without them. At every question that I asked myself I felt the heaviness of sleep, which replied with supreme unconcern, "What matter?" A clear and silvery sound awoke me; it was the voice of a nightingale, perched in the garden opposite, which came to me through the glass and the curtains with a slender ray of moonlight. I said to myself that the bird, an eloquent artist, without taking any trouble, and without fear of failure, a satisfied lover and accepted protector, was happier on his branch than I upon the satin and the down; and I slept again profoundly, so profoundly that I did not hear some one enter the next room, and was aroused only by a noise of tongs with which the drawing-room fire was being stirred.

Some sudden insight restrained

me from calling out, "Léon, is it you?" Had I slept long? My fire was burned out; the moon now shone before my window, one of whose curtains I had left a little raised. I sprang up and walked noiselessly to the tapestry door, which separated me from the boudoir, and which I drew aside a hair's breadth to take a cautious survey. My anticipation was realized. A woman of elegant appearance, richly dressed in black, and wearing a lace veil, had taken possession of the apartment. Was it the marchioness of my expectations? It was impossible for me to see her face, which was turned aside from the mantel-piece, and was not reflected by the mirror, placed very high, to agree with its surroundings; but through the black lace I distinguished a head of splendid blond hair, and a magnificent neck. The figure was supple, slight without being fragile, the movements youthful, confident, and graceful. I perceived all this, for she raised her arm to extinguish the tapers, still burning in the candelabra; she drew one arm-chair from the chimney-corner, brought the other nearer, and put a cushion under her feet. The only illumination now was that of a single taper, overshadowed by a little blue capital. She seated herself with a weary air, and disappeared in the depths of the great arm-chair, leaving in sight only the silhouette of her charming foot before the fire. A little Russia leather bag and a large travelling-wrap of English waterproof cloth were placed on the round table. No other package, no waiting-maid, no member of the

household, taking the trouble to receive her. Evidently, it was an intimate friend, with whom they used no ceremony, to whom they had said as to me, "Come when you please, you will trouble no one, and no one will trouble himself." Some near relative of the master, a sister perhaps? A mistress; certainly not, he would not have left her alone.

Whoever she was, she was there, she was cold, she followed my example and warmed herself before going to bed. What would she think of that bed without sheets or blankets, which had puzzled me so much? That was not my concern; but what caused me a very serious perplexity was the other surprise that awaited her,—that of finding a previous occupant in this blue chamber on which she seemed to count implicitly, since she did not take the pains to examine it in advance, as I had done.

One does not think to profit by such a situation when one is twenty, and bears with him all the bashfulness and modesty of an ideal love. I felt only dread of the approaching scene; the shrieks of the woman believing in an ambush, the absurdity of my apparent boldness, the arousing of my host, hastening in the direction of her cries, the laughter or reproaches, who could tell? A ridiculous situation for me, painful for the lady, embarrassing for the master of the house. In an instant I turned over in my dizzy head all the means of escaping without exposure; to retreat by the window was dangerous, but possible; only it must be opened, this window, and the lady

would cry, "Thieves!" It would be still worse if I concealed myself under the bed or in the curtains. I had had leisure to ascertain that there was no egress from the dressing-closet. I could arrive at only one decision, which was to show myself at once, and explain all immediately, hastening to yield the place to her. This was what I was about to do, and was preparing for it, when the lady started at the sound of a foot-step coming from the anteroom, and ran to meet the new arrival. I profited by this diversion to rearrange the bed, to take my travelling-bag and blanket, and put on my shoes again, that I might not be surprised in the very act of house-breaking.

I had not yet finished these speedy preparations, and was still seated on the sofa, drawing on my boots with a nervous hand, when I heard in the boudoir the sound of a voice too peculiar to leave me in doubt for a moment; it was the voice of Bellamare. While complicating the problem still further, this unlooked-for circumstance reassured me. The lady, not finding herself alone with me, would have no fear, and on my side, I knew that Bellamare would explain my presence so quickly and so well, that there would not be a moment's suspicion of the purity of my intentions. Besides, who knew if this person meant to stay, and if this were not merely a business appointment? Theatrical affairs are sometimes conducted with the most cautious secrecy. I resolved to await the end of the overture and not to listen; but the silence about us was so profound, and the wainscoted

boudoir so resonant, that, in spite of the care the lady took to subdue her voice, it was impossible for me to lose a word of the dialogue, which I will try to give you, word for word.

"You were admitted without having to wait, were you not, Monsieur Bellamare?"

"And without being questioned; yes, madame, with the recommendation not to make a noise."

"Yes, on account of the next house, No. 23, which is occupied at present."

"I know it. Two of my actors are staying there."

"Two? ah heavens! who?"

"I presume that you know neither of them."

"I know them all. I have followed your performances to Orleans and Beaugency. Is it M. Léon?"

"Yes, madame, Léon and Lawrence."

"What a singular coincidence! I am so confused — I do not know if I shall have the courage to tell you, now — Heavens! how extraordinary my conduct must seem to you! What an opinion you must have of me!"

"I am a man who has seen so many extraordinary things, that he has ceased to be astonished at anything; and as to my opinion, it ought not to disturb you. I have not the honor of your acquaintance; I know neither your name nor your condition, neither your country nor your residence, since you are not at home here; neither your age nor your face, since you conceal it from me by a veil. I understood perfectly that it concerned an affair of the heart, and

did not for a moment suppose you were enamored of my forty years and sunburned visage. Your letter was urgent and charming. I am kind-hearted and obliging; I came. You have requested secrecy; I make a point of justifying your confidence. So I am here at your service; speak; come to the point, without fear. The nights are short at this season; lose no time, if you fear to be seen on leaving the house."

"You seem so good to me, and I know you to be so delicate, that I will take courage. I love a young man who is a member of your troupe."

"Lawrence or Léon?"

"Lawrence."

"He deserves to be loved; he is a brave and worthy fellow."

"I know it; I have obtained all the information possible about him. I witnessed his *début*: he pleased me. He did not display his talent to advantage that evening; he was confused. His face awoke my sympathy; his voice went to my heart. Another evening I saw him again, and he was admirable; he made me tremble and weep. I felt that I loved him madly; but this secret would never have left my heart, had it not been for the events which followed this performance."

"The duel with Captain Vachard?"

"Precisely. I know this Vachard: he wished to address me; he was ill received, for he was inexpressibly disagreeable to me. Wounded by the bluntness of my refusal, he slandered me. It is his habit; he is a dishonorable man. He then became odious to me, although he had

done me no injury. My life is without reproach, I might even say without emotion, and no one who knew me credited his falsehoods; but the men of the present day have lost the chivalric instinct; and among those who were my natural defenders there was not one who dared say to this soldier, "You have lied!" The lesson he deserved must needs be given him in connection with another woman, an actress, and by a very young man. I resolved, from that moment, to struggle no longer against the passion with which the artist had inspired me, and to make his fortune and his happiness, — if he would consent!"

"The deuse! 'fortune and happiness'; when one can unite those two extremes, one always consents!"

"Stay! It was not for me that he fought, I have been informed of all the particulars; it was for a comrade, for this charming Impéria, with whom I should be in love, were I a man, and whom I have applauded since then just the same, and with all my heart. I am good-natured, and I know how to be just. If these young people love each other, as it is very possible and very natural to suppose, keep my secret. I have told you nothing; and as for me, I will be resigned; I will conquer myself; I will have hoped nothing, felt nothing; but if, as some say, there is absolutely nothing between them, if Lawrence merely wished to make the dignity of the artist respected in her, you who must know the truth, you whose character and reputation are of the

greatest weight in my eyes, you will reassure me, and assist me in making myself known."

"The last version is the true one. Impéria is a person of perfect purity, and even somewhat shy. She confides in me as if I were her father. If Lawrence had spoken of love to her, and if she had loved him, she would have taken me for confidant and adviser. If he had spoken of love to her, and she had not responded to it, she would, perhaps, have concealed it from me; but she would have treated him with coldness and distrust, whereas I see a peaceful and lively friendship existing between them."

"You are sure, then, that he does not love her?"

"I think I may be sure of it. I can ascertain by observing him, without saying anything, or by questioning him in your behalf."

"In my behalf? O no, certainly not yet! You must first know who I am. I am twenty-four years old; I am the daughter of an artist who left me some fortune; I married a man of rank who had none, who did not make me happy, and who left me a widow at nineteen. I went to live with my father again, who also died, last year, leaving me alone in the world, and since then I have lived in retirement. I am still in mourning. I adored my father, and swore that if I ever married again, I would wed an artist, and that I would marry only for love. I have the right; I have the means, as they say, vulgarly; I have twenty thousand francs a year, and all the elegant comfort that my father knew

how to create for himself. My husband did not have time to squander my dowry. So I can choose, and I have chosen. It is for you to learn if I am worthy of being happy and capable of being loved. Ascertain; my name and address are on this card. I fear no inquiries. As for my person, you must judge of that, also; I remove my veil."

At this word, without thinking of my situation, I sprang from the sofa, which creaked feebly, and would have betrayed my presence, if a quick exclamation from Bellamare had not covered this slight noise.

"Ah my Lady Countess," cried he, after having glanced at the card, probably, "you are as beautiful as Lawrence is handsome, and you would be very wrong to doubt your omnipotence."

I was behind the curtain; I tried to draw it aside; my hand trembled; when I succeeded in venturing a peep, it was too late; the accursed black veil, cruelly thick, was replaced upon the head and shoulders of my Galatea. I stayed there, not daring to look longer, for, if her back was turned to me, Bellamare, seated in the corner opposite, was so situated that he could see the tapestry move. So, standing as if petrified, I heard the remainder of the dialogue.

"I am glad that my face pleases you, Monsieur Bellamare; you will tell him, when the time comes, that I am not ugly."

"O the deuse!" replied Bellamare, naïvely, well knowing that the spontaneous expression of conviction never offends a woman; "you are dis-

tractingly beautiful! Come! I will do what you wish. I will make inquiries cautiously."

"Yes, very cautiously, but very conscientiously, I insist upon it; and when you are convinced that I am a serious person, who, after much *ennui*, reason, and virtue, has admitted into her heart and head a lively affection and a noble folly, you will help me to make my hand accepted by him whom I have chosen for my husband."

"You know that Lawrence is at most but one-and-twenty?"

"I know it."

"That his father is a peasant?"

"I know it."

"That he loves the theatre passionately?"

"I know it."

"Very well. I cannot tell you that your choice is reasonable, according to the world; you have, yourself, passed sentence on it and judged it; you must have foreseen *what the world will say about it!*"

"Perfectly; do you blame me?"

"I blame love, devotion, courage, and unselfishness! On the contrary, I should like to kneel before you, madame, and even to tell you that, in my opinion, you have taken the path of wisdom. I have always seen that what is commonly called so leads to deception and regret; but here is the daylight, I believe, and I should do well to withdraw—"

"No, no! Monsieur Bellamare, it is I who must retreat very quickly, for I wish to take the train that leaves in an hour."

"Do you go to Tours?"

"No. I shall follow you no longer

in your journey. Now that my mind is at rest, I shall wait, at my country house, until you write to me and tell me: 'I have gained the information you desire; Lawrence's heart is entirely free; it is time to act.' Then, in whatever place you may be, you will see me arrive. Adieu, and Heaven bless you for the good that you have done me. I leave in your hands the care of my honor and my pride. I have your word, Lawrence shall know nothing?"

"I swear it."

"Farewell again. I am going away by the gardens behind the house. This house belongs to a friend of mine who is travelling, and must know nothing. A worthy woman, who was destitute, and whom I have had installed as guardian here, will come directly to let you out. She is entirely devoted to me, and will not betray me."

Bellamare conducted the Countess to the door of the anteroom. When he returned to the boudoir he started with surprise on seeing me seated in the place he had just left.

III.

"With your permission," said Lawrence, "I will interrupt my story for a while. If it has not wearied you, I can continue it, with as much exactness and sincerity as I have succeeded in doing up to this point. My reminiscences are very fresh, because they were very simple, and recurred to an exclusive preoccupation. After the adventure of the blue room, this preoccupation was divided, and I need to find the clew

to the labyrinth, in which I was, for a long time, lost."

"That is to say," I remarked to Lawrence, "that you loved the beautiful Countess and the charming actress at the same time?"

"Yes and no, no and yes; perhaps, how do I know? You will assist me to read my feelings clearly. Would you like to walk a little way? I am not used to remaining so in one place, and thinking so long about myself."

"Let us return to the town," said I; "share my dinner, and we will resume your recital this evening, or to-morrow, if you please."

He accepted, but on condition that I should go to his father's house with him, as he had not seen him during the day, and feared lest he might be anxious about him. We descended the mountain quickly, and, following the rapid course of the Volpie, we were soon upon the plain. Lawrence took me straight across the magnificent meadows, to the faubourg of the town, which was not much more squalid and ugly than the town itself. Between two stately walls of manure, we reached the house and grounds of Father Lawrence, which had nothing poetical about them, I assure you. The absence of any woman was perceptible in all the details of the yard and the interior, for one could not apply the name of woman to the old virago who was performing her household labors, while giving an occasional glance or turn to the pot upon the fire. The garden alone was well kept, and we found the elder Lawrence there engaged in digging a bed. He was a man of

seventy, well preserved and remarkably handsome, but without expression and deaf as a post. He could exchange with his son alone the few ideas he seemed to have, for Lawrence replied to all his questions without raising his voice, and accompanying his words with a somewhat mysterious pantomime arranged between them. He understood that I was a friendly visitor, and that I should feel much interest in his vegetables, for he did not spare me the description of a single root, and related minutely, in an incomprehensible *patois*, the story of all his horticultural essays. Unable to communicate my impressions to him, I bore the infliction patiently, seeing Lawrence catch up the spade, and hastily complete the bed begun by his father.

"You must pardon me," he said, "I had not done my task to-day, and my poor old man would have worked too much, for he never complains, and often punishes me by doing double duty."

I asked him if this was an absolute necessity.

"No," he replied, "we have enough to live on, without fatiguing ourselves; but my father has a passion for the ground, and if he gave it a moment's rest, he would think that he had committed a crime towards it. He is a genuine peasant, as you see, and outside his garden the world does not exist. The manure that we heap up around us is the horizon by which his thought is bounded, and within it are enclosed treasures of activity, patience, practical intelligence, prudence, and resignation. If you passed a day with him, you

would love him in spite of yourself. He has every virtue,—gentleness, chastity, charity, self-sacrifice. He does not understand what I have relinquished in returning to share his life; but if it were necessary to make a greater sacrifice for me, he would not hesitate. In short, monsieur, I respect and love him with all my heart. I was very glad to show you his handsome face, and tell you what I think of him, before resuming my story. It is a good hour yet before you dine. We shall be quiet here, it is the day after the wedding, and all my companions are fatigued. I will conduct you to my tiny oasis, for I have one which consoles me for the monotony of my occupations and my habitation."

He led the way to the back of the enclosure, which was spread out, in a gentle slope, upon the side of the hill, and was surrounded by walls high enough to intercept the view.

"Formerly, our enclosure was charming," said Lawrence to me; "it commanded an admirable country, and when, on returning from my last absence, my father proudly showed me this rampart that converted it into a tomb, saying, 'I hope that you will enjoy yourself here now,' I was seized with a frightful chagrin; but he was so proud of his enclosure and his young fruit-trees, that I said nothing; only, I reserved for myself the part you are about to see,—a bit of earth the size of a pocket-handkerchief, but which is my delight, because nothing in it has been touched and spoiled."

He opened a little gate, whose key he had about him, and we found our-

selves upon a narrow strip of uncultivated ground which was supported by a bank of great rocks.

"This is only the upper part," he said, when I had admired the view; "I possess the lower portion also. Descend a little cautiously."

He disappeared between two blocks of stone; I followed him, and we descended perpendicularly from projection to projection, till we reached a little torrent which glided along a rocky channel, without other noise than a mysterious murmuring. We were in a sort of natural oval well, for at the two extremities the rock united in such a way that it formed an arch above the running water, and the margin of the excavation was covered with a charming vegetation. The soil of the kitchen garden probably oozed through its walls, and the rains carried thither, in spite of the partition, the choicest of its earth and seeds, for the cultivated plants were intermingled there with the wild flora which had attained unwonted proportions. In the bottom, the spicy arum, the elegant papyrus, the wonderfully graceful cotton-aster intertwined themselves, or grew side by side, with water-plantains, caltrops, water-lilies, and alimas, which had sprung up of their own free will in a limpid pool, a sort of spring or drainage of the land, placed like a moveless diamond a little above the bed of the running stream.

The whole extent was extremely limited, but of considerable depth, and nature had embellished it with so much beauty and luxuriance that I was charmed.

"I call this my Lethe," said Law-

rence; "it is a gulf of flowers, rocks, moss, and wild plants, where I come to forget the past, when it tortures me too much. I lose myself in the contemplation of a cluster of wild roses, or a tuft of grass, and I imagine that I have never lived otherwise than as the stones and leaves; they are happy as possible, living in their natural state, and not tormented in their passive existence. Why should not I be as glad as they, I, who in addition, possess the faculty of knowing my happiness? But I cannot long remain so; I feel that while my will says *Yes*, the cowardly tears that fall upon my idle hands say *No*!"

"Then let us not remain here. Do not relate your sorrows here; perhaps they would destroy forever the virtue of your *Letha*."

"Who knows? perhaps it will produce the opposite effect. The thoughts we strive to banish always return most obstinately. Stay; tomorrow I may not have the courage to continue my story, and I know that you must leave us at an early day. Let us swallow the bitter beverage at one draught!"

And the gardener's son, having washed his earth-stained hands in the stream, thus resumed the history of his dramatic life.

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY OF A ROLLING STONE.

THE SHIPWRECK.

I left you in the boudoir attached to the blue room, Bellamare returning for his hat, myself issuing from behind the tapestry curtain, and appear-

ing to him like the statue of the commander.

He was surprised, uneasy, disturbed; these emotions passed rapidly over his expressive countenance, and resolved themselves irresistibly into an immense burst of laughter.

"You understand," said I, "that I came here firmly persuaded that I was entering No. 23; I was imprisoned; I understood nothing; I slept—"

"And you heard nothing?"

"I heard everything. I saw the lady, but with her veil down; I guessed at the figure, I could not see the face."

"So much the worse for you,—a marvel! a blond *Fornarina*!"

"You are enamored of her, my dear manager?"

"Disinterestedly enamored."

"You would not marry her?"

"Certainly not."

"Why?"

"You do not know, then, that I am already married?"

"On my honor, no."

"I am, and charmed to be so, because if I were not I might perhaps have a fancy for marriage, and meet with even worse luck."

"Your wife—"

"Is at the devil, I don't know where; but we have nothing to do with her. I am charged to sound you cautiously. Fate laughs at the precautions of the adorable Countess. Now I have only to question you, but not in this house, which is neither ours nor hers. I know you to be honorable, I have no need to recommend silence. Let us go out quietly, and do not visit the next

house now. Come to my hotel: we will talk of the matter on our way."

The old woman who let us out testified no curiosity, said not a word to us, and closed the door noiselessly. When we had gone far enough not to disturb the stillness of this mysterious street into which the daylight began to steal, Bellamare said to me: "Ah well, here is a pretty *début* in your love career! I can tell you nothing; since you know all, my commission is at an end. It remains for you to consider, and ask yourself if you are willing that this first adventure of your life should be the last one; for that is the lady's intention, and she has a right to demand it. What answer shall I give her?"

"You would do better to advise me than to question me," said I; "I cannot be in love with a woman whom I have not seen, and I am so surprised and confused, that I have not an idea in my head. What should you think in my place?"

"Shall I tell you how I reasoned, under similar circumstances?"

"Yes, I beg you will do so."

"I was young, and no handsomer than I am now, but passionately fond of women, and women are always attracted by these earnest natures. So I had a very fair success, but a success as peculiar as my face and mind. An English lady possessed of millions, whose niece I had saved from drowning, in a passage across Lake Geneva, fancied that she loved me, and wished to be loved in return. I asked nothing better, although I should have preferred the niece; but the niece, with the eyes of fifteen,

thought me very ugly, and the aunt, who had somewhat passed her thirtieth year, wished to bind and enrich me by marriage. I shunned the question as much as possible; but when I saw that she clung to it with the obstinacy that these islanders display in their eccentricities, I packed my portmanteau, and slipped off, in the early dawn, from the gardens of Armida. I never heard of my lady afterward, who was, for all that, a handsome and amiable creature; and I preferred to wed a little Columbine, of whom I was enamored, but who forsook me for a Lindor from Toulouse, who used to say to the dresser when going on the stage, *Donnez-moi mes bôtes molles*. I was very wrong to marry this dancer, but I was very right in preferring her to the virtuous and romantic Englishwoman. Columbine, by regaining her liberty, did not deprive me of mine. By preferring an ass to me, she did not take away my mind; in short, by appreciating neither my talent nor my heart, she has left intact my heart and my talent."

"I understand," said I; "a woman who had given you fortune and respectability would have exercised over you morally a right of life and death."

"And the more sweetness she displayed in monopolizing and subduing me, the more fettered and enslaved I should feel, because I am, like you, kind and loyal; but how unhappy I should have been in the padded cage of social observance! A comic actor who is not as absurd in his private life as on the boards soon turns to melancholy and sui-

cide. In short, I have rejected wealth, and more than once under other forms than that of marriage. I never would have chains. Everybody thinks that I have been wrong; but as for me, I justify myself, because I still feel young and joyous. Do not tell me your opinion as far as I am concerned; that is of no use; think of your own particular case. You are handsome, and not a comedian. The person whose heart you have gained appears as seriously in love as possible; you are not yet sufficiently launched in the theatrical life to leave it with ineffaceable regret. Perhaps you are ambitious without knowing it, and capable of playing your part upon the stage of real life. If it be so, marry, my dear boy, marry! Life is a hillside; it is the destiny of some to descend into the plains, where gold and wheat abound; of others to ascend to the sterile rocks, where they reap only the wind and the clouds. Put your mind through a course of gymnastics; you will see whether it is light or heavy, if it inclines toward the practical or lets itself be blown away by the idle breeze. And on this, let us go and take a nap."

I followed him without replying, uncertain and weary. I threw myself upon a bed, and found no escape from my perplexities.

Bellamare slept for several hours, and then prepared to leave with Impéria and Anna, who was entirely recovered.

"I leave you here, free until tomorrow," he said to me; "go find Léon and see the lions of the city with him. And you can even ask

his advice, without mentioning No. 25 to him, and without giving him any particular, any hint, which might chance to lead him to guess the person afterwards. For the rest, Léon is as safe as myself; he is a serious young man, a mind of lofty temper. His opinion ought to have more weight with you than mine."

"Will you not tell me the name of the Countess?"

"Never, unless she authorizes me to do so. At present, I am charged, if you remember, to ascertain if your heart is free. Is it, yes or no?"

At that moment Impéria came out of her room, carrying her little carpet-bag, all worn and faded, and gathering together the folds of her small travelling-cloak, to cover up her dress, frayed at the armholes. The contrast of this modest poverty with the opulence of the lady whom I had caught a glimpse of through her rich laces occurred to me like a revelation of my true instinct. Was I ambitious? Was I susceptible to the spell of luxury, so dazzling to eyes not wont to view it? Was poverty repugnant to me? Could my imagination conceive of an enjoyment of riches capable of making me forget the cherished image of my little comrade? My soul cried no with all its might and all its spontaneity.

"Ah well," continued Bellamare in a low voice, "I ask if your heart is free? Are you deaf?"

"Upon my word," I answered in an undertone, "the Countess is too curious."

Bellamare took me by the arm, withdrew me two or three steps from

Impéria, and said to me, "If you care for this one, you cannot care for the other?"

I dared not impart my secret to Bellamara. I dreaded too much lest he should oppose me. I replied that I was free in every way, and that I should consider twice before renouncing so great an advantage.

"You will rejoin us to-morrow at Tours?" said Impéria, as she was entering the railway carriage; "remember that without you and Léon we shall not dare to take a step."

"Have you not *the others* and the dear manager?"

"The dear manager will be too busy with the general installations, and *the others* are very nice, but *they are not you*. Adieu! amuse yourself well, and do not forget us."

She departed, regarding me with so purely affectionate an expression, that the emotion of the blue room appeared like an empty dream. One would have said Impéria had divined my situation, and I persuaded myself that her eyes said to me, "Do not love any other than me."

I did not speak of these things to Léon. Since I was no longer undecided, I had no reason to consult him. I talked to him only of himself. His friend of No. 23 was a scion of good family, serious and well informed enough for a man of leisure. We visited the castle of Blois together, whose history he related to us, interspersed with interesting details. That evening he invited us to spend with him, and have a cosy chat over our punch and excellent cigars. It was in this quiet conversation that I understood,

for the first time, the mysterious pre-occupation of Léon.

Léon was no longer a boy: he was thirty-two; he had lived much and learned much in living. His ruling passion had always been the stage. He loved all its fictions, and accepted none of its realities. It was the spirit, and not the letter, that sustained him. He loved all his rôles, inasmuch as he completed them in his mind; and, very careful as to his exterior costume and make-up, he always went upon the stage persuaded that he was the character he was representing; but, at the same time, he detested all his rôles, because he did not find them conceived or written in his spirit. In short, he was too much a master to be a virtuoso, too literary to be a performer; and inwardly he never ceased to rebel against his task, unwilling to renounce it, however, and unable to think of anything but his dear and odious profession.

He wrote, as I have told you, and I was always convinced, I am still convinced, that he had genius, but the most unfortunate sort of genius that can fall to one's portion, — genius without talent. His plays were full of originality, vigorous flights, strong and simple situations; they had that stamp of grandeur and austerity of means which characterize the great masters of former times. Despite these superior qualities, they were, for the most part, unavailable; they needed to be entirely recast, and partly translated, to make the public comprehend them. Acted before ten or twelve persons of culture, they would have been found charming;

but every numerous audience represents a majority of ignorant or idle minds, who can neither study, nor compare, nor reflect, nor conjecture. In the province, above all, nothing must be left to the vulgar interpretation; when they meddle with it, they overshoot the mark, and are horribly scandalized at what would not shock serious and cultivated minds.

Léon was somewhat offended at Bellamare, because he would act only one or two of his productions, and because he had required certain alterations and sacrifices. He said that the duty of a man of intelligence and a genuine artist, like our manager, was to endeavor to instruct and form the public, to create one, if necessary, no matter where, instead of submitting to the bad taste, and subjecting himself to the ignorance of the ready-made public of every district. Bellamare had replied to these reproaches: "Give me a theatre and a grant of a hundred thousand francs, and I swear to bring out your plays, and those of all unknown authors, who give evidence of genius or of talent,—in short, those plays destined to meet with no success. I shall not put a sou in my pocket, and I shall be very happy to advance art; but, with nothing, one can do nothing."

Léon was crestfallen. He did not reproach Bellamare; he esteemed and loved him; but he reproached the age and mankind; he scorned his century, he found himself straitened by it, and dragged himself about like a condemned prisoner who has not merited his sentence. He was un-

willing to make any concession to the vulgar, and his friend of Blois encouraged him in preserving this pride in his genius. As for me, I felt that this genius was too incomplete to show itself so intolerant; but I dared not say so to him, for he said it himself, he felt it, and it was the real cause of his sadness. He thirsted for the beautiful, and knew not how to find in himself the source at which the truly gifted man refreshes himself without needing the support of others.

As for me, I was no better at Tours than at Beaugency, and Vendôme did not witness the unfolding of my artistic talent. The other towns where Bellamare gained and lost money paid no great attention to me. I was, at best, passable. I brought no disgrace upon the performance, but I added no lustre to it, and my associates deluded themselves on my account. Bellamare, always fatherly, assured me that I was useful to him. Still, I could not replace Lambesq, who was insupportable to him, and he could not discharge him till the end of our engagement. It finished without anything to justify the hope I had entertained of becoming Impéria's husband and support. She was to return to the Odéon, and I could not think of soliciting an engagement at that theatre. There were others there, it is true, as tame as I, but they came from the Conservatory. Bocage did not like them. He said that, unless endowed with a special genius, they were all marked with the same stamp, and incapable of rendering their stiff lines supple at his direction; but these people had

situations there and I had none. I did not wish to make a fruitless attempt. I hoped only to preserve my admission, that I might be near Impéria. Besides, the vacation was at hand, and my father counted on me. I parted from my comrades at Limoges, and there Bellamare proposed to engage me for the winter, which he intended to pass in the North of France, or to secure an engagement for me in some company stationed in a large city. I thanked him. I wished to resume my studies at Paris, until further orders, and not to banish myself from Impéria. Her friendship, in the absence of her love, was all my joy; and, without knowing by what path I might arrive there, I still hoped that I might offer her my life.

I gave as pretext that, before entering finally on a dramatic career, I wished to consult my family. Bellamare approved my course.

"Then that affair," he said, "is settled for the present. If you change your mind, come and rejoin me. By writing to the Odéon, you will always learn my whereabouts. For the rest, it will be sufficient to address your letters to Constant. He will forward them to me; but we have another account to dispose of. I have not spoken to you again of the Countess; you have asked me no questions regarding her; it was the duty of us both. I awaited your first move, you perhaps awaited mine; until now that we are about to separate, we must come to an understanding about her."

"Have you not written yet to this lady?"

"Certainly, I have written her the truth. I have told her that you had very unwillingly overheard her confidences, but that you were familiar neither with her name nor her face. I added that you had seemed undecided, that I had advised you to reflect, and that I would not leave you without having asked you the result of your reflections. Speak; the moment has come."

"Tell her," I replied, "that I am touched, grateful; that I was struck with her grace, even through impenetrable draperies; that I perceived the tip of a divine foot and the gold of royal tresses. Do not tell her that these tresses may be false, and that it is difficult to be in love with a woman who conceals her countenance and even the sound of her voice; but you can truly tell her that the good faith of her language filled me with confidence and respect. Yes, tell her that, for it is the truth, and the more I think of it the more esteem I feel for her. You need not add that, if she had not spoken of marriage — But this serious thing has rendered me serious, and you can conclude by saying that I am too young to accept so high a destiny without alarm. It would require excessive confidence to think myself worthy of it and to be sure of always deserving it."

"Very well," cried Bellamare, "it is worded in such a way that I could not improve upon it; but have you not in your heart a little postscript of regret, which would soften the solemnity of the refusal? For it is a refusal, there is no de-

nying it, and who knows if two or three years hence you will not repent it?"

"My dear manager, I have awaited your advice, in a state of perplexity of which you do not divine the true cause; and it is this: if you found that I really possessed talent, you would have said to me, without hesitation, 'Do not think of countesses; study your rôles!' Your silence proves to me how little faith you have in my future as an artist. So it is possible that I may commit a great folly in terminating my charming adventure by a refusal; but, without having considered the subject much, I believe that I must come to that decision, or play the part of ridiculous affectation and bad faith. I am too young for a Don Juan; I should wish in vain to abuse advantages that chance has given me over this woman; I should not know how. I prefer to confess my simplicity and console myself with her esteem."

"Very well," replied Bellamare; "it is always very well! You have truly a heart of gold, and I still hope that you may be an artist. Consult your family; it is your duty, and, if they are willing, await the time when, according to my custom, I shall pass some weeks in Paris, toward the close of the season at the Odéon. We will resume our studies by ourselves, and I have an idea that I shall develop in you all that your nature contains of good and beautiful."

I left him with tears. All my comrades clasped me in their arms; Moranbois, alone, turned his back,

shrugging his shoulders when I wished to embrace him also.

"Have I been guilty of some bad action, then?" I asked him; "you esteem me no longer."

"That is a lie," replied he in his most contemptuous tone. "I am idiot enough to love you, but you are a brute to leave us at the moment when we become attached to you. That is the way with young folks! Always ungrateful!"

"I am not Léonce," I answered him, embracing him in spite of himself; "and if I ever resemble him, I permit you to despise me."

As for Impéria, she seemed to me much more occupied with a new rôle she was studying than with my departure; and I was so grievously wounded thereat, that I resolved to go away without bidding her adieu. She was at the theatre with Anna, rehearsing a scene with unwearied persistency; but just as I was entering the diligence, I saw her hastening up, all out of breath, with her companion. They brought me a pretty keepsake that they had embroidered for me in the side-scenes, during the rehearsals, and Impéria bade me adieu with a tearful smile that restored me, body and soul, to her allegiance.

My father was overjoyed to see me again, and hardly questioned me on the employment of my time. Seeing me studious, and apparently contented with my lot, he did not seek to comprehend why I had travelled all summer.

Nevertheless, I felt almost desperate, and, for the first time, I found my village, my home, my existence,

intolerable. I measured the abyss that divided me from the companions of my childhood, and the coarseness of my normal sphere wounded me like an injustice of destiny. On reflection, I quickly recognized that it was the fault neither of this station, if I could accept it no longer, nor of myself, if it had ceased to satisfy me. The whole trouble proceeded from my father's simple ambition to raise me above his own condition. To leave it in reality, I needed not only years of constant study and unflinching courage, and I felt myself capable of it; but a certain superiority of intellect, and my mediocre theatrical essay, had given me a great self-distrust. You will say that this was unreasonable; that the stage being a very evident specialty, my awkwardness and tinidity should not discourage me from the bar, which is quite another specialty. I persuaded myself, I still imagine, that the two are only one, and that I should be a still worse orator than actor.

By torturing myself with this fear, I finished by rendering myself unable to conquer it, and I conceived a profound distaste for my law studies. I had no means to buy an advocate or notary's office, I was as willing to be gardener as head clerk for life. I would not think of the magistracy; we were then in a political current which was preparing the dictatorship. I had the opinions of my age, and all the ardor of a student. I would resort neither to the protection of my uncle the deputy baron, nor to that of any of the bigwigs of my department; to obtain their sup-

port I should have had to bind myself to assist a reaction which my hot head did not relish, and whose continuance the youth of that time did not credit.

We are not here to discuss politics. I do not know your opinions, and I will not unfold my own to you; but I must tell you that my character remains uncivilized in moral independence, and that, in this respect, I did not err in entering on the life of an artist; only, this ambition for liberty should have been made lawful by genuine talent, and I had, perhaps, no talent at all! What should I do? It was so much the worse for me!

Ennui preyed upon me; for of all causes of *ennui*, irresolution is the most wearing. I was agonized to find no object for my life, and to know no longer how to employ my energy, my intellect, my facility in learning, my memory, the forces of my nature, my heart, and my brain. I had fancied that I was somebody, that I might become something, and suddenly I found in myself only impotence and discouragement around me, only obstacles or precipices. Léon's malady gained upon me, and I felt the horror of it.

There are thousands of young men in this position; for the man of the people, when he has risen somewhat above want, aspires to push his children higher than himself. Well-born youth, whose position is already achieved, know not what we suffer at that triumphant age when we have done with the hated slavery of college, to gain a liberty which leads only to unhappiness, unless by su-

preme effort or some unlikely chance. He who succeeds among us merely does his duty in the eyes of the parents who have sacrificed themselves for him; he who fails, for lack of intelligence or energy, is harshly condemned. They do too much and too little for us. It would be better to give less and exact less.

My father was not a man to condemn me thus; but I knew what he would suffer in seeing me fail, and I asked myself if it was not my duty to dissuade him from his chimera of raising me above my class, before his hopes became more deeply rooted. There was still time to tell him that I did not possess the talent which he had gratuitously attributed to me; that I had attempted to speak in public, and had spoken badly; lastly, that I preferred to assist him in his work, and learn his calling under his direction. Certainly, I should have done so at this period; but on the one hand love restrained me, and with it the desire of following my idol's footsteps; on the other, manual labor, to which I had not been accustomed, filled me with horror, and I could not overcome the disgust which seized me, at the thought of that stupefaction in which I must drown my mind. I felt an inclination to do nothing with my will, rather than enslave it thus. I was very wrong, monsieur, I was utterly mistaken; the acceptance of idleness is the most fatal thought that can enter a human head. I did not dream how much strength the mind preserves, when it is resolved to defend itself; but you see I was too young to know that.

In the midst of this secret anguish I received — the same day, it is to be observed — two letters, which I carried with all speed to my own room, and which I will read you. The first is from Impéria: —

THE HAGUE, October 1, 1850.

MY DEAR COMRADE: You promised to write us, and we begin to be uneasy at your silence. M. Dellamare charges me to tell you so, and I join my own reproaches to his. Have you so soon forgotten your companions, your friends, your fatherly director, and your little sister Impéria, who could not come to that conclusion without regret? No, it is impossible. Either you are too happy in your family to steal an hour from them and devote it to us, or you have some sad preoccupation of which you do not wish to tell us until afterward: perhaps a sick relative, perhaps your father, whom you love so much, and of whom you have spoken so fondly to us. Take at least one minute to reassure us all; and, if it is pleasure, vacation, hunting, excursions, country, and family amusements that engross you, we shall be content to know it, and will not demand a long letter.

For fear of reaching you at a moment when you will not feel much interest in it, my own must give you certain details about us all. I will begin with myself, for you will be surprised to see by the postmark that I am not at Paris.

It is because this year I suddenly took a great resolution. The Odéon had accepted the conditions of my re-engagement, and a few days after

you bade adieu to Limoges, M. Bellamare received the said engagement, signed by M. Bocage, and awaiting only my own signature. I had considered; I felt that in increasing my small salary, they would demand more progress of me than I had made. Then I remembered how expensive and gloomy it was to live in Paris, when one is alone in the world. I was heart-broken at the idea of leaving, for three fourths of the year, the troupe which has become my family, and with which I am so happy, to go and shut myself up in my little dark, damp room at Paris, where my health suffered so much last winter, and where a longer illness would reduce me to receiving the charity of my companions or that of my *concierge*, or dying like a bird fallen from its nest. In short, Paris has made me fear for the present and for the future. If I must have talent, it is not there that I can acquire it, not having the means to pay a good professor, and not wishing to owe my success to his charity. I am distrustful, you know, where I am not acquainted, and I take refuge under the wings where I know how to be at peace. So I entreated M. Bellamare to retain me as pupil and *pensionnaire*; and after having used all his generous eloquence to persuade me that I was acting contrary to my own interests, he was very willing to yield. So you will not see me again at Paris this winter, or perhaps next winter, for I do not feel that ambition to seek my fortune and attract attention there that they attributed to me. I feel better suited in these provincial towns, where they do not

demand so much, and where we do not remain long enough for them to lose their fancy for us. I feel myself a true Bohemian, as I have told you. It is as much a matter of modesty and reason as of taste.

You are enlightened on my account. I pass to the other members of our *roman comique*. Anna is still with us, and still charming as an artist, excellent as friend and *pensionnaire*, although Moranbois still shows himself pitiless toward her megrims. The Moranbois has not softened the coloring of his language, but he has ceased to think me mercenary and selfish, and is at heart the best of men. Léon has finished a drama which is very fine in reading, but is as *unplayable* as the others. I believe, however, that we could risk it here. The impassible Dutch, who listen to us religiously, without appearing to comprehend a word we say, would accept the greatest eccentricities as well as the other novelties of our repertory. All would pass with them like water through a sieve; I believe that the hiss is an instrument of which they have never heard. It is true that they are equally ignorant of the custom of applauding; and if we had not before our eyes all these great faces shining with health, we might fancy we were acting in a desert. There are moments, I assure you, when their immobility, the fixedness of their enamelled eyes, the absolute indifference of their faces, all of the same color, produce the effect of an assembly of wax figures all cast in the same mould, with which an empty hall had been furnished to simulate an audience. 'It

is something inexpressible which freezes and stops one's breath; so I am worse here than I have ever been before.

Lambesq is replaced by Mercœur, a "general-utility man," who plays Frederick Lemaitre, not very successfully; but he is a worthy man, who has a wife and children, who works like a horse, and roars like a hoarse lion. Little Marco improves every day. He is the most successful of us with the public, who always love the comedian. But he is a worthy lad, who loves you and regrets you.

Lucinde is in winter quarters with her wine-merchant, who has become a widower, and whom she expects to marry. No matter. In her place we have Camille, who has been beautiful, and who still has talent. Purpurino has but little to do, since Marco plays his rôles. He is growing thin with jealousy; to console him Bellamare promises to make him speak the part of Thérémène, at the next benefit. That is all, I believe. I finish by pressing your hands, and I do not allude to the possibility of your return to the *wandering fold*. Our manager will write you about it at his earliest leisure.

For me, and for four other faithful and devoted comrades,

IMPÉRIA.

At first I felt restored to life on reading these little fly-tracks; I kissed them a thousand times, I bedewed them with my tears, I interpreted to my liking their gayety, their unconcern, their gentle kindness. It needed but for me to read

the other letter to comprehend the emptiness and coldness of the first; hear it:—

M. B.— has written to me at last. You say no. It is really no; it will be no for me also. Without pique, without shame, without despair, I accept the sentence of your sincerity, and I appreciate so much the more your character. Perhaps I should have had some fear of myself, if you had said yes; but now I am reassured, and very proud of my choice, for you will remain, whether you will or no, the one whom I have chosen, whom I have desired, whom I respect, and whom I love. You will never hear of me again, and you will never have the sorrow of learning that my love has caused my death. On the contrary, I shall survive it. It will be the event, the serious romance, the good and beautiful souvenir, of my woman's life. I know not what this life will be, as regards the world that surrounds me; but I know that at the bottom of my reanimated soul there will never again be dismay, nor weariness. There will be a certainty there, a thought, a faith, a tenderness, a gratitude; there will be you, to-day and always.

THE UNKNOWN OF BLOIS.

Permit me not to show you her handwriting; but I can assure you that it is clear, firm, elegant, and rapid. It is legible as an infant's soul, as a mother's heart. It awoke palpitations in me, as if I felt this generous and faithful hand placed on my head, and as if the mysterious

voice that I had heard from the blue room said in my ear, "Madman that thou art, how canst thou hesitate and doubt?"

I read over the letter from Impéria; it told me very clearly that in the dislike and dread of life at Paris the idea of meeting me there had not weighed a hair's weight. Either from modesty or truthfulness, it spoke of friendship for me, only as the spokesman of a collectivity; but the heart, which might have slipped, adroitly or instinctively, its personal note into the concert, had neither unveiled nor betrayed itself. The desire to recall me to the wandering fold had not manifested itself. I had fought for her, and I had never spoken of love to her; she was grateful. She esteemed me enough to write to me; but all the company might have seen her letter, and all the world might comment on it. What she said of her tenderness for her Bohemian companions was intended for them, and not for me.

Moranbois was right. She would never love any one; cold and prudent as her talent, she needed a strolling life, to thaw a little, and not to grow weary of her own reason. It was not the art that she loved; it was the movement and distraction, necessary to her fearful and reserved temperament.

What whim, what monomania, had then inclined me toward her? Why had I scorned this stranger, who did not fear to reveal herself to the very depths of her soul? I had the entire heart, I possessed the intoxicating secret of an invisible woman, whose name I did not know; the veritable

unknown was the companion who *thou'd* me in the animation of our daily studies, and who, to conceal the frightful emptiness of her heart, had invented a mysterious love that she did not feel.

Without hesitating or reflecting, and entirely on my first impulse, I took two sheets of paper, and wrote on one, "Success to you!" on the other, "I adore you!" I put the name of Impéria on the first; I wrote on the second, "To the unknown"; and I put the two sealed letters in one envelope, addressed to Bellamare; but at the moment of closing the latter, I grew cowardly, I withdrew the three words destined for Impéria. I persuaded myself that I was too proud to testify pique to her. I effected a compromise, and feigning not to have received her letter yet, I wrote to Bellamare:—

"You forget me. I learn by accident where you are. I wish to tell you that I love you still" as a father, and beg you to remember me kindly to my comrades. Will you have the goodness to transmit to the unknown—whom you know—the brief letter here enclosed?"

And the letter departed. I overcame the fright which my audacity caused me. My hand trembled on throwing into the letter-box these three words to the Countess, which perhaps enchained my conscience and my life forever. I felt it, I persisted in it. It was sweet to me to break with Impéria. I relished a sort of vengeance that I dared not tell her, which would have injured her in no way, which would have

made her laugh if she had known it, and which might recoil cruelly on me alone, but which flattered my pride, and set me free, as I thought, from a year of constraint and torture.

Thus matters stood for several days; then I thought that I must, nevertheless, reply to Impéria. I succeeded in writing her a long letter of the most absurd and gayest character. I took much pains with it, and I verily believe that subdued anger gave me wit. I meted out to her exactly the dose of attachment that she had so skilfully measured to me, and testified no desire to rejoin her. Once more I burned my ships, and fancied that I burned them for the last time.

This incident rekindled my desire to study. If the Countess accepted my change, and understood this spontaneous outburst of my heart, I must employ the time that kept me far from her in rendering myself worthy of her. It was not necessary, on that account, that I should be received as advocate, or make a trial of a doubtful talent; but I ought to study law, not to be incompetent for the struggles of practical life, and I ought, at the same time, to develop and improve my intellect, in every sense, as much as possible. So I returned to the task with a sort of fury. I procured all the serious books that they could lend me in the country. I began to learn, by myself, the languages, music, drawing, natural history, promising myself to pass the following year in Paris, and to take as many lessons there as my portion would pay for and the days would admit of.

My father, who was so proud to see me read and write occasionally, was amazed to see me read and write day and night. He had no idea of anything like fatigue of the brain.

I awaited with anxiety the effect of my declaration to the Countess. I was disappointed at receiving no reply. The vacation ended. I departed for Paris, without any settled purpose; but having acquired a taste for study, and led on by self-love, wishing to repair my failure on the stage by gaining some sort of value, I kept my resolution. I separated myself from my former gay companions; I shut myself up with my books, and went out, only to attend court or special recitations. I had been there a month, when I received from *her* these few words:—

"I have been travelling. I find your note. How it troubles me! What does it mean? Explain yourself. Why was that no? Why is this yes?"

"Reply to me under the name of Mademoiselle Agathe Bouret, *poste restante*, at Paris. In two days I shall receive your letter."

I replied:—

"I love you without having seen you. I have loved you in spite of all that separates us. I will be as sincere as you. When I heard you at Blois, I was bewitched. Your letter chased away the empty phantom; it took me as the tide takes the shipwrecked man, and does with him what it will. I was mad when I dared to tell you so. I am so still, to dare to repeat it. I lower myself,

I humble myself, in your eyes, by confessing to you that I am only a waif, perhaps I destroy myself; but I will conceal nothing from you. You have named, you have guessed, her whom I loved. She knows it not, she has not divined it herself! She will never know it; and now you will see in me only what I am, a child! Yes, but a child who will become a man, and who studies with ardor, to know, to understand, to be. Do not tell me again that I must give you my obscure name, and receive your fortune, which humiliates and disheartens me. Tell me that you will love me again, that you will write me, that you will permit me to love you. Love, love, let us speak only of love! I comprehend and feel nothing else; the rest is a dream!"

Eight days later she wrote me:—

"Impéria is adorably gracious, refined, pretty. I know who she is; she is of a better family than I. She is destined to regain by her talent the brilliancy of her former lot, tarnished by no fault of hers. You loved her; that was a matter of course. She did not guess it; proof that she is pure, and that you respect her profoundly. Not to dare to tell her! That is the greatest love that one can feel! Do you wish me to tell her myself? At present it would be all my happiness, all my pride, to make her life secure by uniting her to a man worthy of her. It is impossible that you do not love her. Do not struggle with yourself; you might lose thereby that sincerity of heart which now constitutes the

nobility and charm of your good and beautiful nature. Stay thus; it is thus that I will love you, as a sister loves her brother, as a mother loves her child, since you are still a child. One word, and I hasten to the Hague; I explain all to Bellamare, and we work together skilfully, delicately, resolutely, for you. I bring you Impéria; I marry her to you, and then I reveal myself."

This letter crushed me. I realized that I was ruined. My unknown was the bravest, the most generous of women, but she was a woman. I had been wrong in my frankness; she returned me to Impéria; what I had nearly written to the latter she wrote to me without remorse, "Success to you!" that is to say, "Love whom you please." Proud and lofty in her romance, she preferred to play a grand rôle, and deigned not to descend to the contest. She would not aid me in struggling against a possible relapse, or give herself the trouble of curing some half-stifled regret. She had had the energy to offer herself; she had not the energy to conquer.

On recalling all that I had heard in the blue room, I recognized that her whole course expressed and contained this mingling of courage and prudence. She had wished to know if my heart was entirely free, if she could take possession of it without danger; she would not talk of me before assuring herself of this essential point. Without doubt, Bellamare had satisfied her in this respect; and at that time she attributed my refusal only to the modest pride of a

poor devil, alarmed by a rôle above his abilities. That was why she had written me this adorable letter that had overcome me, me! and which left her soaring above me in the serene might of her magnanimous attachment. I should have understood her; I should have been silent, and allowed the sincere and delicate confidant of our love to act in my stead. I had not dared to trust my secrets to him, this excellent Bellamars. He was too near Impéria. He might suffer her to guess that I loved her, — or that I loved her no longer.

How ought I to have answered the Countess? I do not know, but I could answer her nothing. I tried in vain. Each burst of love, each protestation of sincerity that I strove to express, plunged me deeper into the slough of humiliation. I no longer found in myself the strength to convince her; her confidence had deprived me of mine. She treated me like an irresolute child, almost like a lying child. I asked myself if she was not right, if she did not read my feelings more correctly than I did. How could I write or speak, when I knew that each word would give a handle to a suspicion well grounded and systematically reasoned out? It seemed to me that I was face to face with her, as I had been with the public, when at each frozen word of my utterance I fancied I heard each spectator answer me, "Bad actor, you feel nothing of what you express!"

I did not reply; that is to say that I wrote twenty letters, thirty perhaps; and burned them all. And every time that I burned one I was glad and

said to myself, "Do not begin a contest in which you will be worsted. Even though this woman should love you enough to free you from the fear of a disproportioned marriage, and to give herself to you, she will recover herself at a given time; she is the stronger, because she is the calmer, because her rôle governs yours and crushes it. You will love her passionately, madly, with the violence of youth, and the faults of inexperience; always generous, her resolution taken, she will crush you with her sweetness, her forgetfulness, her disdain, perhaps! No, a hundred times no; tear her from your imagination; and if her charms have found their way into your heart, grind your heart to powder, rather than dishonor it."

I kept my resolution; I did not write again. I plunged desperately into work once more. I abstained from all pleasure, I forbade myself the theatre; I was seen no more upon the benches nor in the side-scenes at the Odéon. I acquired not much knowledge, but many ideas, and I perceived, with a pleasure mingled with alarm, that I had a gift for everything, that is, perhaps a gift for nothing. Thus the winter glided by. I thought no longer of Impéria; I believed myself cured of my fancy for her. As spring approached, I felt a trouble in my weary head, dizziness, and loss of appetite. I refused to pay attention to it. In the month of April, these slight symptoms recurring, I took a long walk in the sun, about the environs of Paris, fancying that I should refresh my blood by violent exercise. I went to bed on my return; I had a brain-fever.

Between sleep and delirium, I know not what happened to me. One morning, I became conscious of a great languor. I recognized my chamber. I believed I was alone, and I went to sleep again, conscious of wishing to sleep. I was out of danger.

I awoke; clear images replaced the formless, nameless phantoms that had swept me along with them in the chaos of delirium. I beheld Impéria again. She was in a garden full of flowers, and I called her for rehearsal, which was held in another garden, beside it. I raised myself, and called her, with a feeble voice. I was still dreaming while awake.

"What do you wish, my dear friend?" replied a sweet and very real voice. And the beloved head of my dear comrade appeared to me, bending over mine.

I closed my eyes again, thinking it was still a dream; I reopened them, feeling her little hand on my forehead, from which she wiped away the perspiration. It was she; it was truly she; I was no longer feverish nor wandering. She had been there for three days. She cared for me as if I had been her brother. Bellamare and Moranbois, who had come to Paris to make their annual engagements, relieved her, alternately, with me. She rested, then, in the next room; she did not leave me. She explained all this to me, to prevent me from astonishment or questions.

"You are safe," she said. "You need much rest; you have nothing better to do; we are here; we will not leave you until you can walk.

Do not thank us; it is a duty for us to assist you, and a pleasure, now that we are no longer anxious."

For the first time she began freely to call me "thou," either through a feeling of maternal interest, or because she had entirely adopted the habits of the strolling theatre, little ceremonious at that time. I covered her hands with kisses; I wept like a child; I adored her; I thought no longer.

She helped me to take a little lemonade, which she had herself prepared for me. They had scarified my shoulders with cupping-glasses, and she had inspected and dressed them, as a sister of charity might have done. I am not sure that, during my unconsciousness, she had not condescended to the humblest functions of sick-nurse. This girl, so pure and so reserved, felt neither shame nor disgust beside the bed of illness. She tended me as she had probably tended her father.

This boundless charity is a virtue which it is impossible to deny to actors. Impéria had acquired it in this station where she was not born, and she exercised it with all the sweetness of her attentive, considerate, and delicate nature. The kind-hearted Régine, who had returned to the Odéon, came to nurse me also, but with too much noise and zeal. I felt really better only when Impéria was near me. Anna paid me a brief, though very affectionate visit, but she had a jealous lover, who would not permit her to come again.

One evening Moranbois said to Impéria: "Princess," — he always addressed her so, with a half-respect-

ful, half-derisive tone, — "you are pale and yellow, not to say green. You are worn out. I wish you to go home, go to bed, and sleep a whole night. I will take charge of your patient, and will be answerable for him. Go! Moranbois has said it; Moranbois desires it!"

I joined my entreaties to his. She was obliged to yield; but while she was preparing my medicines, and explaining carefully their use to Moranbois, I cried like a baby who has promised his mamma to behave very well, but who cannot see her depart without sorrow and dismay. Fortunately I hid my head between the sheets, and no one saw my poor weak tears.

This was my first feint. Afterwards, when reflection returned to me, I continued the deception. In the room they often talked of me in a low voice, and the torpor of convalescence rendered me indifferent to what they might be saying. Gradually, on regaining my consciousness more fully, I bethought myself to listen, and if possible surprise some revelation of Impéria's true sentiments in regard to me. So, from time to time, I simulated a profound sleep that no noise could disturb, and I was careful not to lose a word, while giving to my features the immobility of utter deafness. This time I acted my part very well.

The only interesting dialogue that I overheard was this one, between Impéria and Bellamare. It was decisive, as you will see.

"He always sleeps as well as this!"

"Always."

"And you, — you are not tired?"

"Not at all."

"Do you know that he is still handsomer, with that pallor and that black beard?"

"Yes, he reminds me of Delacroix's Hamlet."

"Come now, my child, what surprises me is, that you are not enamored, all in good faith, with this handsome and worthy boy."

"But I assure you, I do not love handsome boys."

"Because they are fools. This one is intelligent."

"Certainly, I love him *morally*, and with all my heart."

"*'Morally!'* a delicate word in your mouth, Mademoiselle de Valclos!"

"Do not be mischievous, Monsieur Bellamare. I am twenty-three, and I see all that the stage unveils, more frankly than society. So I will not affect ignorance with you. I know that love is a fever which certain glances kindle; I know that ugly persons inspire passion, and that handsome ones can experience it, when they are not exclusively wrapped up in themselves. Yet notwithstanding all this, I have never felt the least agitation with Lawrence or with Léon, who is also very handsome, and in no wise vain. Why? It is impossible for me to say. I am inclined to fancy that my eyes are not artistic, and do not perceive the influence of a fine physique."

"That is singular! Was he whom you preferred ugly?"

"He must be!"

"Ah! it is a long time since I have had an opportunity to talk se-

riously with you, my dear pupil! Does this preference really exist?"

"You do not believe it?"

"I have never believed it."

"And you were very right," replied Impéria, stifling an odd little laugh.

"Why did you invent this romance?"

"So that they should leave me in peace."

"Then you distrust me also, since you did not confide the stratagem to me?"

"I have never distrusted you, my friend, never!"

"And you are resolved not to love?"

"Very resolved."

"You think it possible?"

"It has been possible so far."

"If Lawrence loved you, himself?"

"Do you believe that?"

"I believe it. He may have abandoned us from pique at your indifference!"

"I hope that you are mistaken! I am very much attached to him, but I am not in love with him, my friend, and it is not my fault."

"I have told you, without revealing anything to you, that he was loved by a lady of rank."

"You have told me so; it did not inspire me with the wish to please him. I am not coquettish."

"You are perfect, I know, and I am not one of those who will tell you that a woman without love is a monster. I have seen so many amorous monsters of both sexes, and I dreamed in my youth so many stupid things that I thought sublime—"

"That at present you believe in nothing?"

"In nothing but virtue, for I have encountered it two or three times in my life, walking like a tranquil goddess over the foul streets of the infernal regions, and receiving not a stain upon its robe, which passed white and shining in the midst of impurity. You are one of these strange exceptions, before whom I bow down to the ground, Mademoiselle de Valclos! I find it so beautiful, that I shall carefully refrain from dissecting an ideal like yourself! I think men senseless to demand purity from women in order to love them seriously, and to wish straightway to destroy this purity for their own profit. They have only scorn for the weak, anger at the strong. What would they have, then? For, my part, I am all indulgence and pardon for the first, all respect and adoration for the second. Upon this, dear child, I will despatch my dinner. What do you wish me to send you for yours?"

"Tell the *restaurateur* to send me what he likes."

"He will send you veal!"

"Very well!"

"Veal! it is ignoble; it is not nourishing; a mutton-chop, eh?"

"As you choose, my dear friend; I am not an epicure."

"Sensual in no fashion, it is well known."

"Stay, however; I adore potatoes."

"They shall send you potatoes."

"And first of all, some good broth for my patient; but say, then, manager of my heart, have you money?"

"Not a sou to-day, my little one; but that makes no difference; the

innkeeper knows me, and to-morrow I receive some."

"But this evening you are going to the Vaudeville?"

"Ah well! Have I not my admission?"

"It is wretched weather; take something to pay for an omnibus."

"You have money then?"

"I have twelve sous."

"The deuse!"

"Take them, come!"

"Sooner death!" cried he, with a tragic-comic air, that made Impéria laugh, after he had gone out.

This mixture of delicate and trivial things which I relate to you, this sudden transition from elevated thoughts to the vulgar realities of every-day life, this exquisite, profound, and sincere respect which Bellamare had for Mademoiselle de Valclos, returning abruptly to the paternal familiarity with the little actress of his troupe, paint for you, I think, in their true colors, the height and depth of the minds of intelligent actors. I was more struck by it to-day than I had ever been before; I had just heard the irrevocable truth in all its candor, and, what will perhaps surprise you, I was not grievously afflicted by it. A convalescent has not keen impressions; one would say that he has but one object, which is to live, no matter at what price; and then I had sincerely renounced Impéria, in offering my heart to the Countess. I should have scorned myself if the slightest irresolution had justified the injurious suspicions of my unknown. Even after the tacit rupture which these suspicions had brought about

between us, I should have hesitated in returning to my first love. So I assured myself that I would henceforth be to Impéria what she wished me to be, her brother and her friend. To the sentiment with which she inspired me I gave the names of tenderness and gratitude. At twenty, one accepts these impossible compromises boldly and in good faith. We think ourselves so strong! we have so naïve a pride!

When I could leave my bed, Impéria quitted me; the next day, which I passed in an arm-chair, beside a very moderate fire, she returned, and, without removing her hat and cloak, kept me company during the afternoon. I was strong enough to talk without fatigue, and I greatly desired to know the pecuniary situation of Bellamare. What I had heard made me think with reason that it was not brilliant. I asked if he had been successful in Belgium and Holland.

"No," said Impéria, "quite the contrary. Our tour with you was profitable enough; but as soon as Bellamare has any profits in his hands, the love of improvement takes possession of him. You know that he always dreams of advancing art, while making a living; and then he is so generous! So he hastened to increase all our salaries, and to engage Mercœur, who is inferior to Lambesq, but is better paid, because he is the father of a family. The same with Camille, who is not equal to Lucinde, but supports herself only by the stage. The receipts diminished; living is expensive in the North. It was in vain that Anna,

Léon, and I restored to Moranbois's treasury, unknown to Bellamare, the surplus of the salary that he had forced us to accept. The season finished, he came out honorably, as he always does in his engagements; but we arrived here with nothing; and if I had not had a tolerably good quantity of my lace to sell, still without the knowledge of Bellamare, I know not how we should have lived. Now we are sure of paying for our food and lodgings. Léon has been at Blois, on a visit to his friend, whom I believe you know, and who has lent him a sum that Bellamare accepts. He always accepts, because he always finds means to repay, and when he has repaid, he begins to have nothing again; it has been so for so long, that his serenity is never affected by it, and we have grown accustomed to share his confidence."

I resolved that I, too, would put one of my thousand franc-notes into the treasury, and I began to consider. Bellamare had great schemes for the summer: he wished to leave France, where we had too many competitors, and he said that French being the universal language, if good actors starved at home, it was because they lacked the courage to travel. That evening it was Moranbois who kept me company. I wished to hand him my offering: he refused it. They could run in debt a little with Léon, he said, because he would eventually inherit a rich patrimony, and was a beggar only because he chose to be so; but they knew very well that I was not in a situation to sustain Bellamare's enterprise with my money. Bellamare

was always satisfied when he made both ends meet, at the end of the year, and, according to Moranbois, Bellamare was right.

"Because," said he, "if a man makes an honest living, what does it matter if he lays up nothing? The wisest and the best are those who succeed in just escaping poverty. They have not the trouble of possessing, preserving, investing, and increasing. The responsibility toward others is enough to satisfy an honest man, without the need of adding that stupid responsibility toward himself, which they call the faculty of management, which prematurely ages people in the prime of life. It is this anxiety in directing their money matters," said Moranbois, in his figurative language, that expands their stomachs and decays their teeth. The master — so he styled Bellamare — "will always be young, because he will be niggardly neither to himself nor to others. He will not waste his freshness in building a palace to hold the dried apple that he will be twenty-five or thirty years hence. I hear everybody speak of providing for their old age, as if they were sure of having an old age, and as if they ought to desire one! The pretty calculation of devouring their blood so long as they have it, in order to have something to nourish them, when they will be nothing but rubbish fit for the rag-picker's basket! They say to the improvident, 'You will then ask alms when you can work no longer!' As for me, I answer that the peasants till the ground till the day when they are buried in it, and that they are buried just so surely, whether

they have a fine linen sheet or an old cloth for a shroud."

In spite of my agreeing to this high philosophy, I insisted that I should be permitted to furnish Bellamare and his friends with the means of agreeably occupying and improving their youth as artists.

"We have a thousand francs from Léon," replied Moranbois. "It is enough to set us afloat again. I could get the master in debt, without his knowing it, but it would not be rendering him a service. If you wish to be useful to him, come and travel with us as a member of our association."

He then explained to me that Bellamare, Léon, Impéria, Anna, Marco, and himself had resolved to share in common the proceeds of their performances, and that, after having deducted the payment of the *pensionnaires* and the common expenses, they would divide the entire profits in equal parts among themselves.

"As for the profits," he added, "there will be none, but we shall have lived, worked, eaten, travelled, for a year, without being a burden to any one. See if you wish to be of the party. You need to shake up your sauce-pan, and extinguish your furnace, so the physicians say. You will not travel alone, that costs too much, and is too gloomy; with us you will enjoy yourself, and the expenses will be paid by the receipts."

"I would accept gladly," I answered, "if I had enough talent to contribute effectively to the receipts; but as I have not, I should be only one expense the more."

"You are mistaken; talent or not,

you draw the women, and fill our front seats for us. Léon, in the tender rôles, is worse than you, and they like him only in the drama. We have not replaced you, for lack of the wherewithal to engage a lover; you were very useful to us; we perceived it after your departure; our audiences fell off."

I confessed to Moranbois that this exhibition of my person humiliated me greatly. To justify a man in posing as a model before the public, he should know how to speak to their understanding as well as to their eyes. Moranbois, with all his penetration and intelligence, could not understand my scruple, and laughed at me for it. He thought that, when one is handsome and well made, there is no lack of modesty in displaying himself. I saw the former mountebank reviving in him, the cross-roads Hercules, exhibiting with satisfaction the muscle of his neck and shoulders.

I consulted Impéria in regard to Moranbois's proposition; her first impulse was to welcome the thought with a sincere and amiable joy; then I saw her grow uneasy and irresolute. I guessed that, warned by the supposition of Bellamare, she feared to encourage my love. I reassured her by telling her that I was betrothed to some one in my own province, but that I was too young to think of marriage; and that I was free to go about the world as I fancied, at least for a season. I thought that I could tell her a falsehood, as she had done with me; and as she had pretended an affection to preserve herself from my hopes, I assumed one to preserve myself from her fears.

Then she insisted strongly on taking me away with them, and the physician who had attended me seconded her. If I recommenced my studies before six months, it was all over with me. I wrote this to my father, who signified his approval by the hand of the village schoolmaster, his secretary. Moranbois and Bellamare welcomed me with delight. Bellamare drew up a handsomely written page, which set forth the rules of our association, and we desired that a clause should be added, by means of which he should preserve his absolute authority as manager over his *pensionnaires*. We were unwilling that any one among us, in some day of nervous excitement or misanthropic weariness, should impede by idle discussions the exercise of a direction as active and intelligent as his.

Anna courageously left her lover, who abused her, and whom she mourned for just the same. This girl, always unreasonable and unhappy in love, was the most estimable and faithful of women in friendship. She had neither spite nor bitterness, and she was even grateful to me for not having taken advantage of some emotion which she had experienced for me, in the earlier days of our wanderings. So she rejoiced to see me associated with the new enterprise. Léon, who returned from Blois, and Marco, who came back from Rouen, accorded me the same welcome, and maintained that I was an artist. We departed for Italy the last of August, without waiting for the closing of the Odéon, and without taking Régine, who was to

rejoin us as soon as she was free. We had to engage a fashionable coquette, and some kind of a Frederick Lemaitre, on the way. This was Lambesq, whom we chanced upon again, at Lyons. He had been unsuccessful, and was more tractable than formerly. However annoying he might be, we had owed a considerable portion of our success to him, and we were glad to get him back. Impéria voted for him, saying that we were used to his faults, and we should not easily replace his good qualities.

We were about to make arrangements with a Mademoiselle Arsène, who had played the confidantes at the Théâtre Français, and who believed herself qualified thereby to take the parts of Rachel in the province. We were not as sure of it as she, and were still hesitating, when Lucinde wrote us that she had always wished to visit Italy, and that she would be satisfied with the salary that she had formerly received among us. She had not succeeded in obtaining a promise of marriage from her wine-merchant, who still supplied her with a certain luxury, but who wearied her. She hoped, perhaps, to revive his passion by leaving him alone, and feigning to prefer the stage to him. We waited for her, and crossed the frontier with her. The troupe was quite complete; and, the business arrangements settled, they were glad to meet again. On the route we performed more than one play which required more rôles than we had in the company. At this period, when France was in a state of great disturbance, many

actors, thrown out of employment, sought their fortunes abroad, and we could enlist some of them for a time. These Bohemian actors were occasionally very curious specimens, especially those who, in the midst of the strangest vicissitudes, had continued honest. If I do not speak of those whom poverty had corrupted, or who, in their idleness and vice, had been necessarily and fatally overtaken by it, it is because among those types there is such a sameness, that there is no interest in observing and describing them. Those who, on the contrary, would sooner starve than dishonor themselves, deserve biographies composed by people of ability. It is the peculiar and respectable band of the brotherhood that the practical world do not pity nor assist, because their misfortunes justly prove their lack of common sense, and may be ascribed without mercy to their improvidence and disinterestedness. I confess that I have more than once experienced a very lively sympathy for those honest adventurers, and that, if I had not regarded my little capital as religiously devoted to the accidents which threatened my own comrades, I should have expended it in ready money for the assistance of these chance companions. I will specify one instance out of a hundred, to give you an idea of certain destinies.

His name was Fontanet, — De Fontanet; for he was a gentleman, and neither displayed nor concealed his prefix. He had enjoyed a capital of five hundred thousand francs, and during his simple and serious youth he had lived in the country, on his

own estate, addicted to the collection of works which treated of the theatre. Why this mania rather than another? In point of whims, it is useless to be astonished at anything. Could one ascend to the mysterious source whence flow the innumerable fancies of the human brain, chance would be found the necessary consequence of inclination.

So it was that Fontanet found himself ruined, one fine morning of 1849, by a friend engaged in business, whom he had allowed to place a mortgage of fifty thousand francs upon his property. It was, at that time, a frequent speculation to borrow a slight sum on some valuable estate, not to repay it, to effect by underhand means the sale of the estate, and to repurchase it, still secretly, at a low price. So in this manner stocks frequently fell, to enrich prudent and wary capitalists.

A victim to this amiable operation, Fontanet found it useless to complain; and, fancying that his archæological knowledge of the theatre qualified him to go upon the stage, he became an actor. Nature had denied him everything save intellect; he had neither voice, physique, delivery, ease, memory, nor presence of mind. He met with no success, which did not prevent him from finding his new profession very amusing, and continuing to collect for others the books and engravings which he could no longer buy for himself. Having obtained a subordinate situation in the theatre at Lyons, and seeking a lodging, he found for a very low price a sort of shop, which by reason of its small size could never be

let to any merchant. He installed his pallet there; but the next day he said to himself, that, having a shop, he ought to sell something, and he bought for twenty francs a stock of children's toys,—tops, balls, skipping-ropes, and hoops. At the same time he busied himself in constructing little wooden shovels and wheelbarrows. His business was very good, and he might still have prospered, but the troupe to which he was attached left Lyons, and he could not make up his mind to quit the stage. He resigned his stock to a Jew who knew his weakness, and gave him in exchange an apocryphal portrait of an antique actor. It was a little bronze affair, cunningly adorned with a fictitious legend. Fontanet believed he had secured a treasure, and sought to sell it. He asked a thousand francs for it, and could not resolve to part with it, until the day that he discovered the fraud, and consoled himself for it by saying, "How fortunate that I did not sell it for a thousand francs! How I should have cheated the purchaser!"

In a town of Piedmont he encountered a pious lady, who begged him to direct her to a *good painter*. She wished to ornament her private chapel with a picture, two yards in height by one in breadth, representing her patron saint, and she would pay the artist one hundred francs. Fontanet offered to paint the picture himself. He had never drawn a face nor touched a paint-brush in his life. He set about the work boldly, copied as well as he could some saint upon the first fresco he came across, and signed his name with pride: *De Fon-*

tanet, painter of religious subjects. He had other commissions, hung out a flaming sign, and began to make a living, when chance carried him to another place, where a passion for pottery seized upon him, and he made a number of Etruscan vases, which he sold to the English, but for so moderate a price that they were not cheated, and congratulated themselves on cheating the ignorant vendor.

What Fontanet had earned by his pictures he lent to the manager of a strolling company, who did not repay it; what he had earned by his vases he gave to a poor beggar, to educate a child whose figure had served him as a model, and whom he placed at school. So it was that, after having engaged in a hundred little professions and a hundred little trades, without having saved anything for himself, and still unable to resolve to leave the theatre, which of all his callings was the most ruinous, inasmuch as it allowed him to establish himself nowhere, and brought him into constant contact with adventurers or needy people who despoiled him, he offered himself to us at Florence, to play the *financiers*. He had ended by acquiring a certain talent since his *début*. He was useful to us; and he was so amiable, so gay, so original, and so sympathetic, that we regretted greatly when we were forced to leave him.

I will not relate to you my travels; it would take me three days, and my reminiscences, very good, perhaps, to fill up a desultory conversation, would retard what inter-

ests you,— the history of my feelings and my thoughts.

So I will make you pass swiftly by Turin, Florence, Trieste; I will bring you back through Austria and Switzerland, where we reckoned up our gains at Geneva, after some tolerably successful nights. We had, as Moranbois said, we had seventy-five francs clear profit to divide among seven partners; but we had had an interesting and almost comfortable journey, the *pensionnaires* were paid, and Léon's friend was reimbursed. Lucinde, Lambesq, and Régine left us. My vacation had come, and my father expected me. The other members of the company were going to try their fortune, they did not yet know where. I promised to rejoin them after the winter, which I intended to pass at Paris; and this time Moranbois accepted the loan of my thousand francs, necessary to enable my manager and my associates to reorganize themselves.

Back in my little country Faubourg, surrounded by the paternal radishes and asparagus, I had leisure to recapitulate, as I will try to do for you.

I had made some progress at the theatre. I had acquired an excellent manner, without appearing embarrassed, although I really felt so. I had gained sufficient self-possession not to give, through agitation, the misinterpretations which my intelligence rejected. I still pleased women, and did not displease men. I resigned myself to being always ap-
 paralled like a man of taste. At first I had felt humiliated by this circumstance, saying that I would not owe

my success to the tailor. I saw that the public took more notice of my waistcoats than of my attainments, and held in high consideration a man so well gotten up. My companions, in a moment of facetiousness, had amused themselves by representing me as a young man of high rank, and they dispensed with my being a good actor because I appeared to be a man of the world.

"Do not laugh at that," said Bellamare to me; "you are our ensign; your nobility is productive, and at each new station the imagination of the loungers enriches the company with an additional hidalgo. At Venice I was *il Signor di Bellamare*, manager of a troupe of titled personages, and I had only to say the word to make you a duke and myself a marquis. The prestige of nobility still exists abroad. In France it mingles drolly with democratic vanity; and if you were enough of an adventurer to put a *de* before your name, the people in the small towns would be proud of having a grandee for an actor. So do not deny being one, and do not take all this seriously; we are travelling to amuse ourselves. Be certain that it detracts nothing from the talent that you should have, and that you shall have, I give you my word for it."

He strove to inspire me with it; he did impart it to me, when I repeated my parts to him. We have declaimed Corneille while crossing the Alps on donkeys. The glaciers of Switzerland, the shores of the Mediterranean, the ruins, the grottoes, all the picturesque solitudes that we explored together, re-echoed the

✓ *hidalgo*

sound of our voices, raised to the pitch of dramatic passion. I felt myself powerful, I thought myself inspired. Before the foot-lights, all disappeared. I was too conscientious; I judged myself too severely; I was my own critic and my own obstacle.

So much for my talent; as to my love, it had taken a new aspect. Mademoiselle de Valclos's calmness of mind and serenity of character, which were not disturbed for a single moment, amid the inevitable reverses, mishaps, fatigues, and accidents of travel, had insensibly awakened in me that calm and tender respect which they inspired in Bellamare, without exciting in him the slightest thought of passion. Bellamare was, notwithstanding, not profligate, but devoted to pleasure. He knew no medium between desire without affection, and affection without desire. This man, so happy in his disposition, and so seductive from the kindness of his heart, exercised a powerful influence over my mind. I wished to adopt his views and feelings. I strove to imitate him in his errors and his wisdom; but where he found calm, the clearing up of faculties after the *exfogation** of instincts, I felt only self-contempt and profound sadness. I was an idealist, and, besides, I was but half his age. It was absurd of me to fancy that one can arrange his life like that of another. Reason

does not fit us like a borrowed garment; each one should know how to adapt his own to his own individuality.

This infatuation for Bellamare, and this fancy of wishing to resemble him, succeeded at least in stifling my passion. Perhaps the rapid and violent passage of another love through my heart, the dream of the *unknown*, had somewhat effaced the image of Impéria. It is certain that I dreaded her no longer, and that a deep tenderness assuaged the secret violence of my desire. Seeing her so respected by my other associates, I should have thought myself a coxcomb to dream of vanquishing her. By dint of no longer dreaming of it, I no longer even desired it.

At least it was in this frame of mind that I left Geneva. After returning home, I thought of her without agitation; but soon it was impossible to conceal from myself that she was necessary to my intellectual life, and that away from her I was subject to profound *ennui*. I had not the courage to resume my serious studies. Music and drawing pleased me better, because they permitted me to think of her. She had a charming thread of a voice, was a good musician, and sang deliciously. While endeavoring to become a good musician myself, I thought only of singing with her or accompanying her. During our travels she had made me practise from time to time, and, in the main, her lessons were the best that I have received.

For some time I cherished the delusion that the society of Bellamare, Léon, Anna, and Marco was as es-

* I have retained this word in Lawrence's recital, because it struck me. I do not think it French, but I could wish that it was so. On the part of my narrator, it was, doubtless, a reminiscence of Italy, where the verb *sfogarsi*, admirably expressive, has no equivalent in our language.—*Author's Note.*

sential to me as that of Impéria. They loved me so much! They were so amiable and so interesting! How insupportable the lot to which I had returned appeared to me! In vain I reproached myself for this gulf between my former friends and me. I thought myself guilty, for regretting the conversation of Bellamare, when with my father; but was it not my poor father himself, who, by introducing me to civilization, had condemned me to break with barbarism?

Still, when I was candid with myself, I felt that I could have forgotten Bellamare and all my comrades, except Impéria. It was not my father's fault if I had conceived a foolish attachment for a person who was unwilling to love any one.

One day when I was crossing the Alps in a sledge with Bellamare, he had asked me the result of my affair with the Countess. I then told him the whole truth, or very nearly all. At that time I was fully persuaded that I had ceased to love Impéria, that I should never love her again, and that Bellamare could repeat my confidences to her without injuring me. I had, besides, considerably softened the ardor of my first passion in my revelations, and I had left its origin untold. I did not plume myself on having embraced a theatrical career on her account. I simply confessed that at the time of my adventure at Blois I had been more in love with her than with the unknown. All the rest I could relate frankly.

Bellamare's judgment on this situation struck me greatly. He approved of me at first, and then added, "Without knowing it, you have tak-

en the best course to be truly loved by this Countess; sincerity in the first place, followed by pride. When allowing you to see her suspicious, she expected a speedy reply, a contest in which she would declare herself vanquished, only after having rolled you, to her liking, over the dust of the arena. At that moment she had ceased to love you. That is the way with women. It is rendering them a service not to indulge them in their combative instincts, but to teach them to love sincerely, as they know so well how to love, when not misled by a quest for the impossible. Love is a fine, a sublime thing with them, at the *début*. Beware of the second and third acts of the drama! When one cannot hasten the *dénouement*, one must await it. Wait, then, in silence, cover the fire, and you will see her return, faithful and brave, as in the day of the blue room. If she does return, receive my congratulations. If she does not, rejoice at having escaped a love of the head. Those are the worst."

And Bellamare had added further, "If Impéria had not formed a resolution, I should have blessed your love. For my part, I think you worthy of each other; but she is discreet, and will not have a lover. Again she is reasonable, and will not rush into the misery of marriage. Lastly, she is happy in her virtue, and I believe in it, although I do not understand it. So, if you are reasonable yourself, do not think of it again. Do you fancy that the first day when she came to me, mysteriously, as the Countess, but with ideas otherwise

serious and decided, to tell me her family misfortunes, and to entreat me to give her a profession and support, that I was not agitated, as much as, and perhaps more than, you were in the blue chamber? She was so pretty in her sorrow, so seductive in her confidence. I was seized with dizziness ten times, in these two hours of *lille-d-lille* conversation; but if Bellamare has a nose to scent an opportunity, and a claw to seize it by the forelock, he has an eye to distinguish true virtue, and a hand which purifies itself in blessing it. On leaving her, I had promised to be her father, and to every afterthought I had said, "Never, never, never!" Now, when things present themselves so clearly to my conscience, I cease to have the slightest merit, because there is no longer the slightest struggle, and I confess that I cannot comprehend how it costs an honorable man more not to deceive a woman than not to cheat at cards."

At that moment Bellamare's argument seemed unanswerable; I reflected on it all through my vacation. I could find no reply to it; but it did not prevent me from being very dejected and unhappy. I tried to rekindle my affection for the Countess, and often I dreamed of the joy of mutual love; but on awaking I cared for her no more. Her image appealed to my heart only through imagination.

When the vacation was ended, I asked myself whether I should not renounce law, which conducted me to nothing, and rejoin Bellamare's company. I was unwilling to take this resolution without consulting

my father. I expected that he would dissuade me from it; he had no idea of it. At first I had some difficulty in making him understand what the theatre was; for a dramatic troupe had never come among us; we had no hall. What my father called *comedians* were the Swiss tea-dealers, exhibitors of menageries, and the mountebanks, whom he had seen at fairs and public gatherings. So I was very careful not to utter the words "comedy" or "comedian," which would only have inspired him with a profound scorn. Despite my resolution to be open, I gave him explanations which, although really true, conveyed to his mind only a vague and somewhat fantastic meaning. My father has always had the primitive simplicity of a man devoted to manual labor, as to a duty, a religion from which no idea foreign to this labor can distract him, without disqualifying him for it. My mother, who was very intelligent, had laughed at him a little for his credulity and his good-nature. He suffered her to do so, and was very willing to laugh with her; they adored each other, notwithstanding but he would not have permitted me to notice his inferiority to me. He wished me to be *different* from himself, but not *superior*; he esteemed his vocation as unlike mine, but equal to it. His adoration for the earth did not allow him to think otherwise, and he was really quite in the right of it, and entertained a high philosophy without suspecting it. He respected learning very humbly, but it was on condition of according equal respect to culture of the soil. If he had dis-

couraged me from it, it was because he imagined, by making me a peasant, he would unfit me for the fancied succession to my uncle, the *parvenu*.

When I had told him that I desired to join a company of persons, who spoke in public to exercise themselves in declaiming finely, he was satisfied, and asked no more about it. He had feared to show me by his questions how little he knew of the nature of this study. So I departed, carrying with me his blessing, as heretofore, and my little capital, which, since the preceding year, I had always borne about with me in an under-waistband. It was not heavy enough to trouble me, especially as I had already diminished it one half.

In the beginning of the winter, then, I rejoined the troupe at Toulon, and was received enthusiastically by them. The situation was not brilliant, but they were still "getting along," as Moranbois phrased it, and they held a council to decide if they should continue the exploration of the coasts.

At this period the towns along the sea-shore had hardly begun to enjoy the vogue which they have since acquired. There was, as yet, no question of railroads, gas, or gaming-houses. Europe had not yet laid siege to that narrow coast which stretches like an espalier in the sun, from Toulon to Monaco, and which will soon extend to Genoa.

"My children," Bellamare said to us, "we shall still 'get along,' if we do not make a great figure. I have never made money except outside of

France; no one is a prophet in his own country. I have made very nearly the tour of the world, and I know that the farther off one comes from, the more he attracts the curious. Do you remember that last year we succeeded better at Trieste, the extreme limit of our journey, than anywhere else? I wished to push on to Odessa, across the Danubian provinces. I recollected having been successful there; we should have returned by Moscow. You recoiled before the Russian campaign. If you trust me with it, we will undertake it; but as winter is approaching, we will begin with the warm countries. We will go to Constantinople, we will remain there two months; we will go from thence to Temesvar and Bucharest, which is also a good city; then as soon as the weather will permit we will cross the Balkan, reach Jassy, and arrive at Odessa with the swallows."

Some one remarked that the cost of the trip would be considerable. He showed us letters from a successful contractor, who would be responsible for our passage, and promised to take charge of our return, if we could not pay the expenses; it was a former partner, on whose honesty he believed he could rely. It was put to vote. Each one tossed up a coin, for "heads or tails." The majority of the throws decided the voyage. I confess that on seeing Impéria desire it, I cheated to make the balance incline to the affirmative side.

Once more I will make you take a stride over the tiresome or amusing details that would be irrelevant to my subject. I will only tell you,

that, if the majority were valiant and hopeful, the minority, represented by Lucinde, Lambesq, Régine, and Purpurin, were only partially or not at all so. This last did not pardon foreigners for not knowing French better than himself, and Lambesq, who pretended to speak Italian, was furious at being less misunderstood when he spoke his own language. His nature was imbittered, like that of Léon, by disappointments, but he had not, like Léon, the good taste to conceal his wounds. He believed himself the only great genius in the world, and the only unappreciated one. According to him, the artists loved by the public and favored by fortune had owed their success only to intrigue.

Régine laughed at everything; no one was more inured to the miseries

of nomadic life; but she augured ill of our pecuniary success, and kept repeating that it was nothing to go away, the difficulty would be to return. Lucinde feared nothing on her own account. She was not a woman to embark with empty hands. But she feared lest we should be forced to pay the expenses of the return passage, and she did not conceal her anxiety.

Singularly enough, Moranbois, the most stoical and self-contained of all, was no longer without uneasiness; he did not know Zamorini, the contractor to whom Bellamare had intrusted himself, but he had, he said, had a bad dream about him; and this man of stone and iron, who feared no peril, and knew no hesitation, was superstitious, — he believed in dreams!

2
THE END.

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